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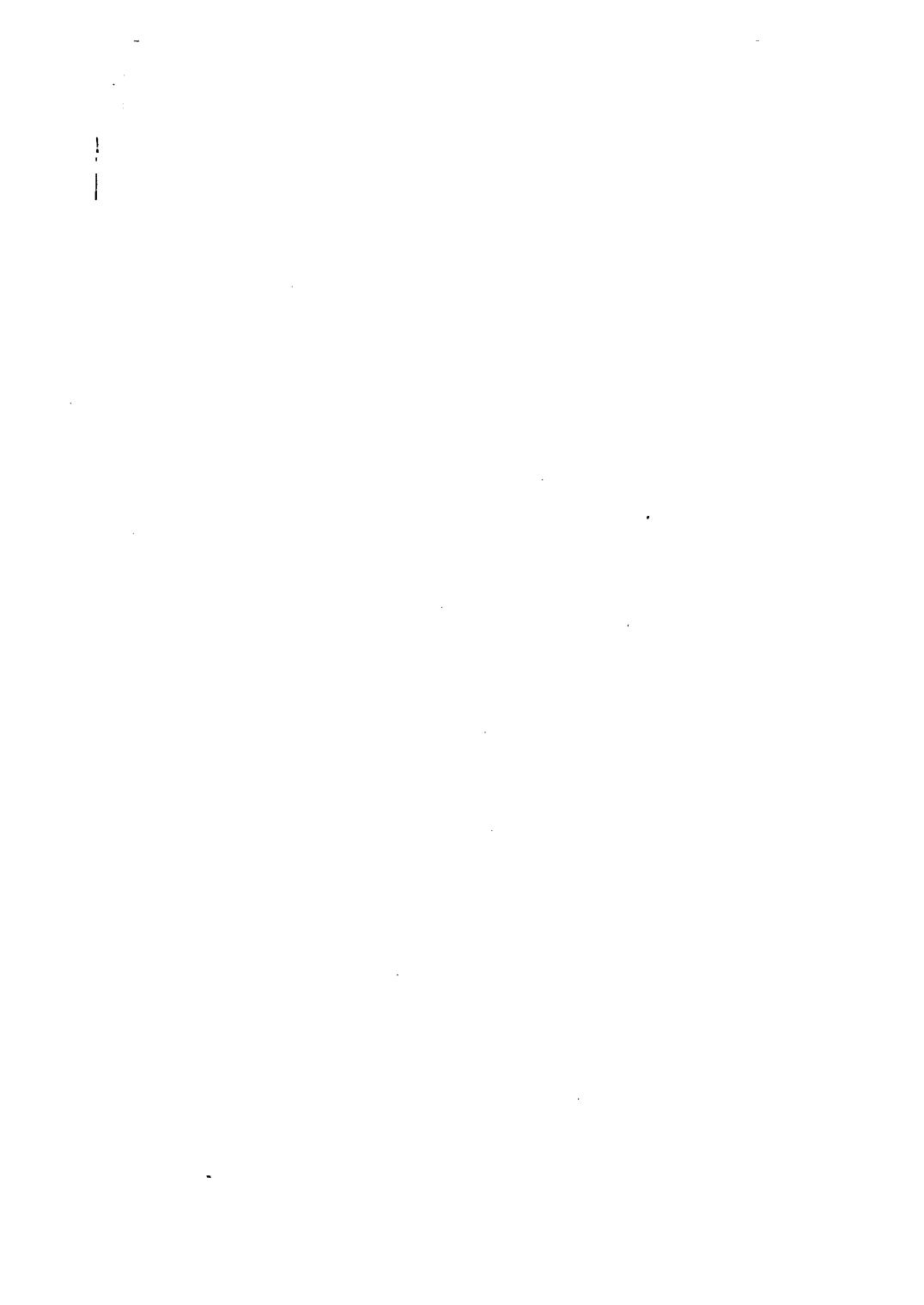
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DENISON'S WIFE.

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DENISON'S WIFE.

A. Hobel.

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER FRASER,

AUTHOR OF 'NOT WHILE SHE LIVES,' 'FAITHLESS,' ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



'Nihil est ab omni parte beatum.'

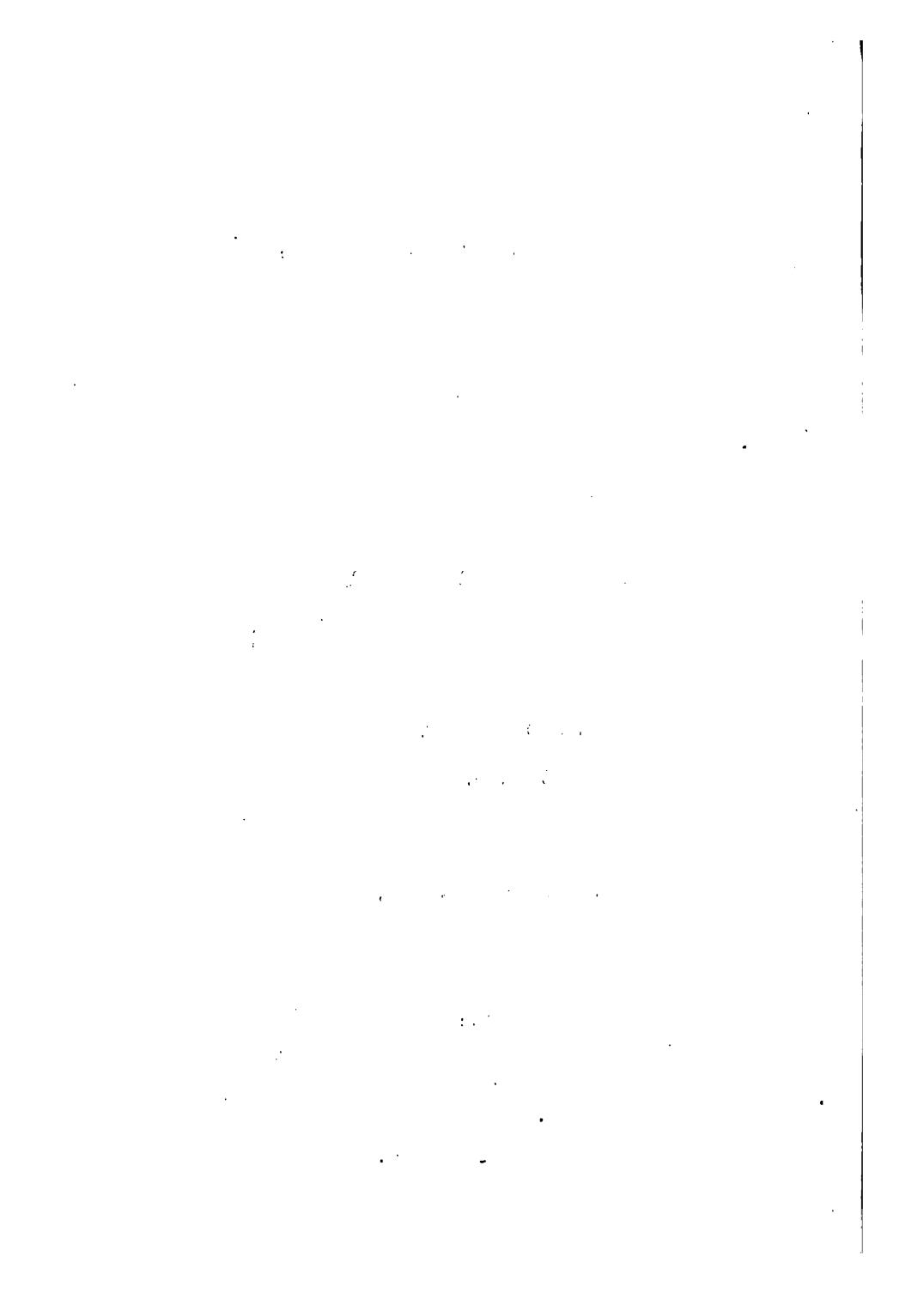
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DENISON'S WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

LA SALLE DORÉE.

‘And hence one master-passion of the breast,
Like Aaron’s serpent, swallow’d up the rest.’

‘Gold, gold, gold, gold !
Bright and yellow, hard and cold !’

Hood.

IN these days of perpetual locomotion, when, bomb-proof against the puffed-up attractions that are so glaringly placarded every-where of our native seaside and fashionable watering-places, a lengthy stream of English flock annually to the celebrated continental spas, it would be not only a thankless but a superfluous task to enter

into any detailed description of that well-known chamber of mental rack and torture, the great gambling saloon of Homburg-les-Monfs.

Nearly every one has seen its elaborately gilded and porphyrised walls and ceilings, with semi-draped Cupids and Venuses and cherubs 'sitting up aloft,' and nearly every one is more or less familiar with the physiognomies of the *habitués* that, both winter and summer, swarm round the tables like greedy and unwary flies.

Here and there a broken-down, out-at-elbows British M.P., or a shabby-looking luminary of the Church of England—both considerably the worse for unhealthy occupation and evil associates, and presenting rare subjects for *gibier de potence*; a good sprinkling of unkempt professors of *trente-et-quarante* and roulette, intent on well-thumbed cards of the game; sallow Poles and Spaniards, with emaciated visages and

hungry eyes ; Israelites *with* guile and a deal of hirsute adornment ; some few pompous Russians, rich in *billets de banque* and glittering rouleaux ; and one or two of that unmistakable type, tweed-suited and ruddy-faced English tourist.

Not a very inviting sketch of the company that is generally to be met with at the tables, and assuredly one that is far from being the *entourage* in which our correct national notions of propriety would place a woman—much less a lady ; but, notwithstanding the salient objections offered by the spot, it was at Homburg that Denison had located his wife.

He had completely wearied of Paris very shortly after his first *rencontre* with the Leslie, and in spite of her efforts to enchain him again at her feet, the Lady Millicent's attractions had proved utterly futile to detain him in the French capital.

The monotonous *régime* of Parisian

existence, that consists in 'doing' the Bois de Boulogne, the theatres, and the most celebrated restaurants day after day, after boring Denison *au dernier degré*, had ended by creating repugnance. He was so thoroughly blasé in all his tastes and feelings, and so utterly devoid of one honest and healthy aspiration, that, although eternally on the *verve* for some new excitement which might help him to while away a tedious hour or so, nothing seemed potent enough to bring him 'up to the mark,' a result for which he was perpetually craving. In truth, he had long ceased to expect any genuine zest in either occupation or amusement, and all his efforts were directed to the aim of trying to cheat old father Time of his insupportable dulness by some wild freak or absurd folly.

Always restless, always on the alert for a 'flitting' somewhere, he might have been a second *Juif errant* in his love of change;

and certainly nature had never designed him to fill a place in the calm domesticity of connubial existence.

Ennui rendered him morose. *Il aboie tout le monde*, as Claude Castleton sapiently remarked to a mutual acquaintance, and with perfect truth; for Vere's temper appeared to grow daily more irritating in its cynical acerbity, and was a curious antithesis to the quiet nonchalance of his bachelor life. He was no longer complete master of his movements, and it chafed his imperious spirit very sorely to be forced to sacrifice his own inclination to circumstances.

Before his marriage he had no one to study. Self was the god to whom he had bowed down and worshipped so utterly and slavishly, that at the last the smallest contrariety or trivial discomfort appeared to him in the light of a positive evil and misfortune. And now he was obliged to

check his erratic flights and roving propensities, and to remain, *nolens volens*, in Paris, just because, in the name of all that was unlucky and ill-timed, the advent of his first-born was near at hand.

That event once over, and his wife partially reinstated in health and strength, he delayed no longer, but made a rush to the German Spa, knowing full well that the keen excitement attendant on a sojourn at that place would be a thousand times more consonant with his tastes and feelings than the quieter and more sober amusements of Paris; and all through the long days, when Katie lay so white and prostrate on her couch, but infinitely happier than she had ever been before in the whole course of her life, with a great well of pleasure in her full heart, and incessant work for her eyes in watching the precious atom of humanity that had so recently put in an appearance into this 'vale of tears,' Denison scarcely

ever visited the sick-chamber, and even when he did so, lingered by his wife but a minute or so, and barely so much as noticed the tiny occupant of the cradle, that stood enshrouded in all the finery of azure and white muslin, arranged by a young mother's fancy and skill.

His time was completely monopolised by a study of all the most complicated 'systems' that had ever been invented to *sauter* the gambling bank; and yet it was not from any undue partiality for 'filthy lucre' that he tormented his brain incessantly with monetary calculations. He was not a stingy man by nature, and as regarded his personal requirements he was even unusually lavish *de dépense*; but he hungered, literally hungered, for the delicious excitement of gambling, and desired to find a mode of securing the cornucopia which would provide him with ample funds for indulging in the dangerous pursuit.

So that half into the night, when Katie slept calmly and peacefully, with a charming little beatific smile upon her parted lips, as in her innocent holy dreaming she clasped her baby nearer to her breast, Vere, pacing his own room with impatient steps, invoked anathemas on the unlucky causes of his detention in Paris, and longed to put into working order all his wonderful stratagems for hoodwinking the wily 'administration' and holding the wheel of fortune in his own grasp.

Once having reached the much-desired goal of his fancy, he plunged headlong into the vortex of play, and from the early hour when the game commenced to the time when the rooms closed for the night, he rarely quitted the fascinating tables except to snatch hurried meals.

Even to them he went reluctantly, although up to this period he had been considered somewhat of a *gourmet*, and an ener-

getic mover of *recherché* repasts at Richmond and Greenwich.

Meanwhile, poor little Katie led as lonely and dull a life as though fate had placed her in the big desert of Sahara, in lieu of a gay and fashionable spot; but, with her child to amuse her and occupy her time, she never opened her mouth in murmurs, and patiently and good-temperedly submitted to her liege lord's expressed desire that she should refrain from entering the Kursaal, and even the lovely gardens that appertained to that establishment; never guessing that his motive for the latter restriction was a selfish fear lest, tiring of trees and flowers, she might perchance wander into the rooms and fetter his play by her supervision; for in spite of his habitual *sang froid* and hardihood, a feeling of unwillingness lurked within him to let his wife become cognisant of the immense sums of money of which he was a

daily loser, although he knew well enough that the lips which had never uttered a harsh or angry word to him, but had even striven to smile under the pain of his satire and mockery, would scarcely vex him by remonstrance or advice, unless it was offered up gently and in an affectionate spirit.

For the space of two months after their arrival at Homburg, Katie obeyed him, not only in spirit but *au pied de lettre*, never straying beyond the limits of the very circumscribed parterre that belonged to the detached villa in which she was located, unless she ventured, accompanied by her child and its German *bonne*, to take a rustic ramble towards Kierdorf, or the adjacent villages that lay a few miles away on a lonely and unfrequented road.

But one sultry day in midsummer her eyes detected an unwonted flush on the child's face, and to her anxious mind its little palms felt like burning lava within

her clasp; and thinking solely of 'baby,' the monarch whose liliputian sway filled her heart, she forgot all her husband's oft-reiterated injunctions, and, regardless in her alarm of her grand seigneur's edict, flew in search of him as the proper and sole partner of all her joys and woes.

The game was high, and the crowd intense. One or two famous players, who had gained unenviable notoriety by their success at Baden and Wiesbaden, were staking the maximum on the table with all the non-chalance possible; and the exciting sight had gathered together most of the Homberg visitants, intent on watching the desperate struggle between foolhardy mortals and fickle dame Fortune.

Completely out of breath, and with nerves strung up to a high pitch, Denison's wife crept noiselessly in at the door of the great salon, and glided through the mass of people; her slight but symmetrical figure

showing very advantageously in a quiet dress of feuille-mort, while a black-lace hat dropped low over lovely eyes roving and restless, and cheeks pink with anxiety.

She glanced hither and thither hastily, trying to discover her husband through the triple, nay the quadrupal row of spectators that, like a huge human wall, entirely shielded the seated players from view; and she was turning away reluctantly and hopelessly, finding all her efforts of peering through an occasional gap or elevating herself on tip-toe futile, when her name pronounced softly in English accents arrested her attention, and looking up, she saw Lord Castleton standing close beside her, with undisguised admiration in his eyes, and genuine pleasure at the meeting in the tones of his voice.

Katie was feeling far too anxious and miserable about the child she had left so ailing at home, to notice the expression of

his face or to respond to his eager greeting by aught but the coldest and curtest of receptions; and Claude, deeply mortified at her manner, was turning away with a swelling heart, when she suddenly caught hold of his arm, and besought him to find Denison at once.

Almost before her words had left her lips, Lord Castleton had espied over the heads of the bystanders the whereabouts of Vere, and had discovered as well, to his inward annoyance, that Vere's right-hand neighbour was his own pseudo-deity, Schmerzundweh.

For various reasons he was reluctant to approach the actress, especially with Katie on his arm, dreading lest womanly pique and jealousy should evoke remarks derogatory to her upon whom he had learnt to look as the best and purest angel that had ever found its way down to this gross earth.

The distasteful collision was, however, unavoidable under the circumstances; so, hot and cold all over, he waded with his charge through the crowd, breathing an earnest hope within himself that the vision of the promised diamond locket might prove an efficient talisman to ward off any unpleasantness. The very idea of Schmerzundweh displaying even a sign of recognition in the presence of Katie unnerved him completely, and made him lose his habitual *savoir faire* in an uncomfortable awkwardness and shyness, that would have better befitted a *gauche* schoolboy than a man of the world; and yet he was fully aware that never by the slightest word or deed had Katie ever encouraged him to believe that he or any action of his could in any wise interest her.

Denison was seated at the table in close proximity to the famous *lionne*, and he was flanked on the other side by the Countess Seguinoff, a wrinkled, toothless old bel-

dame, whose days were spent in gambling, and who would probably breathe her last sigh over the *tapis vert*.

The Schmerzundweh presented a very full-blown appearance, that detracted a great deal from her beauty.

The excessively heated temperature of the room had imparted too deep a rose tint to the cheek that was already blooming with the touch of art. Her ample neck, in her demi-corsage, literally blazed under the yellow sun-glare with gorgeous jewels, and her arms, partially exposed by loose hanging sleeves, were gauded in like manner.

She was evidently putting forth her greatest powers of fascination to arrive at amicable terms with her English *voisin*; but the empressé manner and the vivacious glances were utterly wasted, judging by the undisguised indifference with which Denison regarded her, and in fact all the rest of the motley company.

He sat forward in his chair, eschewing elegance, and resting both his elbows on the table, while his whole appearance, far less soigné than usual, took away from him all idea of the *petit maître* which he ordinarily presented. As a rule, he was too particular in the minutiae of toilette; but now his hair was ruffled and pushed carelessly off his hot handsome face, his lips were very white and set angrily together, and his eyes were riveted on a mass of glittering fredericks that lay on the cloth just before him.

He had been losing both his money and his temper all the morning, and hoping every moment to retrieve himself; but each successive deal had turned up worse than the last for the system he was pertinaciously playing, and the pile of money now lying on the table was pretty nearly the last drop of oil in the cruse, and, once swal-

lowed up by the insatiable bank, would leave him on his last legs.

He was so thoroughly absorbed in the game, that his wife's proximity remained unnoticed. Moreover, he would have as soon imagined the sun to shine at night as have expected Katie's presence anywhere that he had forbidden her to venture.

He knew he had taught her implicit obedience enough for her to hesitate well before she attempted to defy his wishes for the purpose of satisfying her own inclinations.

‘How many times has the black won?’ he asked in a vague and general sort of way of the people near him.

‘Huit fois, the black made us win; but the série last no more, bien sur!’ answered the Countess Seguinoff in a shaky, quavering tone of voice.

She plumed herself, like the rest of her compatriots, on her attainments in foreign

tongues, and she never allowed an opportunity to slip by in which her vaunted proficiency could be displayed.

‘Then, by Jove, I shall go in for a ninth black; there’s luck in odd numbers!’

And Denison nodded an affirmative as the sleek-faced croupier nearest to him touched the gold, with a ‘*Tout va à la masse.*’

‘O, Vere, do not be so foolhardy,’ Katie whispered hastily, stooping over his shoulder; ‘you know you cannot afford to risk so large a sum. Do take some off, there’s a dear!’

Denison glanced up at her with surprise depicted on his features at her unexpected and, sooth to say, most unwelcome presence on the scene.

‘Be quiet, *will* you?’ was the rough and muttered response that she received in reply to her gentle remonstrance; and with an impatient gesture he turned his face away from her.

‘Quarante !’

And a low murmur of discontent rose up from the backers of the black.

‘Quarante après !’

And the dealer glanced round with a suave smile on his countenance at the disappointed partisans of the red.

‘The devil !’ ejaculated Denison. He was leaning right over the table, eagerly scanning the cards as they turned up one by one. Then he hastily pulled another small rouleau of fredericks from his pocket, and added that to the stake already before him. He felt perfectly certain of winning, and a bright exultant expression rapidly crossed his face as he eyed the heap of bank-notes that a well-known *gros joueur* had placed on the red.

‘Quarante ! deux. Rouge gagne et la couleur !’

And Denison’s mass was hastily swept away.

‘Curse it!’ he hissed out from between his teeth, and then he turned to the first legitimate object he could find upon which to pour out the vials of his wrath.

‘I believe *you* brought this ill-luck;’ and he glared round angrily, utterly forgetful in his irritation that there were several witnesses to his words and looks. ‘What on earth are you doing here, when I have expressly forbidden you to enter these rooms?’ he demanded imperiously of his wife.

‘Dieu! qui est cette personne?’ Schmerz-undweh questioned audibly and insolently, addressing a dapper little Frenchman, with a retroussé moustache and a frogged coat, whom she had constituted her *cavaliere-servante pro tem.* and *faute de mieux*, and whose daily devoirs consisted in standing all the hours she gambled meekly behind her chair, with a huge fan of peacock’s

feathers in one hand, and an elaborate flacon of perfume in the other.

After the fashion of his nation, an expressive shrug of his narrow shoulders and a vacant look on his sallow physiognomy was the only reply elicited; but the actress was indifferent to his silence. She surveyed Katie from head to foot with a contemptuous curl on her full red lips, and knew well enough *whom* she was insulting by her remarks and gestures. Katie had once been the innocent instrument of inflicting a wound on her vanity, and it was not likely that attractions that had cast her own into shade would ever be forgotten by a petty mind.

‘Sapristi! comme elle ennuie mon pauvre voisin!’ she continued, looking askance at Lord Castleton, and smiling impertinently as she noted the vexation imprinted on his face.

Poor Katie trembled all over, and grew

red and pale alternately as she listened, and finally understood that the invidious allusions were to herself.

It was the first time that she had been placed in such a sink of iniquity in the course of her existence.

All the people surrounding her looked so strange and so different from any with whom she had come in contact before; for, after all, life at the Larches had been innocent and tame enough, in which a croquet party or an occasional ball had formed an important era. And even in Paris, after her marriage, Denison had inured her to quiet evenings, with no companions but books or the society of a loquacious soubrette, whom she disliked and avoided. This was initiation into 'life' that she would thankfully have steered clear of; and, nervous under the fierce glance that Denison had shot at her, she whispered, half crying,

'O, Vere, just listen to that woman's in-

solence! Take me away from here, and do let us leave this dreadful place!

‘Not if I know it; the place suits *me* well enough, and you need not put yourself in the way of receiving insolence if you do not like it! I ordered you not to come here. Go home, now!’

And, utterly callous to her feelings, he turned his back to her, and took out his purse to commence a fresh contest with Fortune.

‘I cannot go home without you,’ pleaded poor Katie, with tears in her voice, although she had contrived not to let them fall from her lids from pride and shame. ‘I only came to fetch you because baby is so ill, and I am frightened to death about him. *Please* come with me, Vere!’

Not a feature of Denison’s cold face softened as she spoke; nothing but an expression of deep vexation was to be traced upon it.

‘I can’t come, and I won’t. The child is right enough; but your ridiculous anxiety about him exaggerates every paltry ailment into a dangerous one. Now, go home, there’s a good girl,’ and he began playing in a small way.

Katie stood very pale and irresolute, inclined to leave the spot at once in which she had been subjected to insult and annoyance. She was in reality in great awe of her husband, although she had barely realised the fact of being so, and the sight of his frowning brow and glittering eye made her heart sink and her breath come quicker than was agreeable. Suddenly looking up, she caught Schmerzundweh’s glance with a wicked little gleam of triumph in it, and calling up all the courage she possessed, she leant over Denison and spoke to him again.

‘The child *is* ill, Vere, and you *must* come home,’ she whispered hurriedly, but with all the determination she could muster.

Denison took in the unusually resolute accents at once, and lost all patience.

By all that was ridiculous, he wondered to himself, was the quiet, submissive little creature he had prided himself on having tamed so completely already beginning to evince spirit and henpeck him?

The game had left off the zigzag tendency it had displayed all the day, and was apparently going evenly at last. An opportunity for regaining all his severe losses, and even perhaps for revenging himself on the rapacious bank, seemed to present itself; and he was expected to sacrifice all the good that the gods were holding out to him, just for the sole purpose of soothing a woman's absurd fears, and watching like a monthly nurse over a wailing infant!

It was too much.

'I shall not move from this at present, and it is useless your waiting for me,' was all he answered; but there was a concen-

trated sound in his voice that spoke volumes, and a peculiar pallor that anger always imparted to his face, and which Katie had learnt to know and dread, over-spread his features. For a minute he bent over the table as if to examine the card he had been marking. The next moment he raised his head with a forced smile on his mouth, and said pleasantly,

‘Here, Castleton, you are not playing. Just pilot Mrs. Denison through the crowd, there’s a good fellow.’

And Katie, sick with mortification, hastily took the arm Claude offered her, and in silence walked homewards, never so much as thanking him for his courtesy in being her escort. She scarcely remembered his proximity. Her heart ached sorely under her husband’s treatment, and her cheeks burnt with shame when she thought how pitifully small she must have appeared even to the eyes of the actress.

Once reaching home, she hurriedly disengaged her arm from Castleton, and with a slight inclination of her head by way of an adieu, ran upstairs to the ailing child.

Claude stood still for a moment or so, watching her receding figure.

Then he glanced furtively around, to note that there were no witnesses nigh to any folly he might perpetrate, and finding himself sole master of all he surveyed, he raised his coat-sleeve just where Katie's little white hand had lightly rested, and kissed the insensate cloth fervently and reverentially. Then he crept stealthily to a large stand of plants that were Katie's especial care, and breaking off a geranium-leaf, placed it as carefully within his pocket-book, as though it had been a *billet de banque*, and slowly left the house.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

'Away on the wings of the wind she flies,
Like a thing of life and light;
And she bounds beneath the Eastern skies
And the beauty of Eastern night.'

'She walks the waters like a thing of life,
And seems to dare the elements to strife.'

IT had been a gorgeous sunset—a sunset such as is rarely seen in cold climes, but one that is common enough in Indian waters, and which, even to prosaic minds, might suggest sweet poetical fancies of fairy palaces up in the clouds, built of deepest sapphire and ruby, and enframed in more exquisite goldwork than the hand of an earthly alchemist could produce. The

evening wore on calm and still, and when Phœbus had quite sunk to rest, myriads of twinkling stars irradiated the vaulted sky, with chaste Diana in virginal purity amidst them. The Sea Queen, with all her unfurled sails shining a silvery white beneath the glorious moonbeams, scudded just like a bird over the rippling waves.

From the goodly company gathered together upon her broad decks sounded bursts of merriment and snatches of melody that went floating over the sea.

A little apart from the noisy, hilarious group, and with his face turned away from them, George Sutton sat quite alone, with his gaze on the lovely illuminated heavens, and his thoughts wandering leagues and leagues away in the dear old land of the West. Almost unconsciously to himself he was occupied in calculating how many miles of water divided him from all that he cared for in the wide world, and absorbed in a

sum of arithmetic that presented a hopelessly enormous total, he had not shifted his position for a long, long while. Although employed with lachrymose memories, still time had flown by unheeded, and he was only recalled to a sense of externals by a gentle woman's voice, speaking closely in his ear.

'On such a glorious evening as it is, can any one enact the Knight of the Rueful Countenance like this? For shame, Mr. Sutton! you should try not to be so unsociable always;' and Blanche Barrington bent forward, smiling and blushing, as she tapped his shoulder lightly with her fan to draw his attention towards her.

Sutton turned his head round slowly, and looked up at her. In the moonlight his face appeared very white and wan, and the miserable thoughts he had been indulging in had left their impress in a perceptible quiver of his under lip. He tried to force

a smile, but it was a ghostly effort at cheerfulness, and it did not deceive the girl who loved him.

'Seriously, I do wish you would not encourage melancholy. There is nothing so contagious, you know, and already symptoms of it are stealing over me, I declare.' And she dashed away, as if in play, a genuine tear from her eyes. There was such a true and sympathetic ring in her tones, that George was touched—he felt so unutterably lonely, so thoroughly desolate. It seemed to him so very hard that Fate had ordained him to lead a life of complete isolation from all human affections. His very soul appeared to crave within him for a little kindness from one of his own species, nay even for a little 'love.' If he had only possessed a sister who really cared for him, he thought he should have been content; but 'love,' much as he coveted it, was a boon that his heart

had set itself up against receiving from living woman, preferring to keep its freedom, that it might revel in morbid regrets and sweet visions of a time that was gone from him for ever.

Still he was but a mortal after all, owning, to a certain extent, the selfishness that is innate in most natures; and although he knew it was wrong, he could not always resist a pleasurable emotion that would creep over him at times when Blanche spoke to him softly and soothingly, and from under her long curling lashes revealed to him, unawares to herself, shy glimpses of her heart.

George felt himself to be a complete bankrupt in affection, and he knew that, with the exception of the girl beside him, there was scarcely a being on the earth who gave him the tribute of a passing thought. He hoped that his mother cared for him, and fancied that she, at any rate,

would weep a real tear at tidings of his death; but her love was so equally divided between himself and his three brothers, that he could hardly claim a very large portion as his own. He was not a vain man, yet something told him that to Blanche he was first and foremost; and this, unconsciously to himself, made his voice in addressing her grow lower with a more tender inflection in its tones than was habitual to them. It was not marvellous, then, that trustful and unsophisticated Blanche began to believe that her golden dreams were on the eve of realisation, and that, after all, the priceless treasure of his love was not quite so impossible to gain as she had often feared—Sutton evinced so marked a preference for her society, seeking to be near her whenever it was in his power to be so, and in her presence disregarding the attractions of many who displayed no reluctance to court his notice.

There were moments, she knew full well, when he seemed to be utterly absorbed and forgetful of everything and everyone around him, but these strange fits of abstraction and gloom were far more rare than they were wont to be in the commencement of the voyage; and, by dint of perseverance, she had learnt to rouse him, and to call up a smile to his lips. Silent and reticent with all his fellow passengers, with a stern reserve in his ordinary manner that entirely repulsed any overtures of friendliness that bordered on intimacy, with Blanche, George was almost himself again, as he used to be in olden days, frank, honest, and natural. The knowledge of this was surely enough to encourage her hopes and nourish her self-delusion. How was she to dream that up to this time the chief charm she possessed in his eyes was the fact of her being the only connecting link he had with the past that was yet so dear to his memory?

Blanche had known and loved Katie! *Voilà tout*; but it was the greatest recommendation in the world to Sutton. Had the cruel truth been shown to her plainly, like a poor little wood-violet she would have hung down her head and faded away quietly, without an effort to live and be happy.

The big tender moon was shining down full upon George's face, and softening the expression of his features wonderfully, as he watched Blanche brush away the tear that the sight of his own melancholy had evoked.

With the bright moonlight above and the fair expanse of blue water around, love-making would have been a very natural result under ordinary circumstances. Diana never beamed on mortal's face so sweet, so true, and so loving, as when she looked down on the gold-crested brow of Blanche, and lit up eyes as blue and as pure as the heaven above. Even George, stoic as he was,

glanced admiringly at the girl, as, robed in white, with a long black-lace mantilla thrown Spanishwise over her fair tresses, she leant on the bulwark beside him, playing nervously with her fan; but 'a faithful likeness of her would make the fortune of any aspiring F.R.A.' was the sole commonplace thought that travelled through his mind as he gazed at her. Her beauty of pearly teeth and azure orbs moved him no more than as if in truth she had been a statue or the work of a skilful hand on canvas. Nevertheless, she *felt* that he was looking at her with a flattery in his glance that made her heart flutter with pleasure. A minute or two of complete silence, with her thoughts in the future and his in the past; then with an effort George essayed to say something to her.

'I must plead guilty to your accusation, Miss Barrington, I am afraid. In spite of the loveliness of this scene and the glory of

the night, I do not remember when I have felt so sad as during the last hour. And I have been picturing to myself how pleasant it would be to leave this weary world, and find a home in one of those bright planets; or, better still, and what would be infinitely more feasible to accomplish, to end all one's earthly troubles by a plunge into the briny deep. Does not the water look terribly inviting?

‘Pray do not say such things,’ she whispered, while a cold shiver passed over her frame at the vision of death her fancy conjured up. She looked at him very pityingly, detecting at once, with the keen-sightedness of love, the real emotion that lurked beneath his bantering accents, and made his voice shake in spite of himself, although it was the tiniest bit in the world.

O, how inexpressibly she longed to take his hand, and to tell him that his troubles were *her* troubles, and that right will-

ingly she would have laid down her life to insure him a happy future! The scene at the Larches, when she had told Katie she would die to bestow happiness upon George and herself, rose up vividly before her, and she shuddered at the recollection of the utter desolation she had felt that day, knowing full well that George belonged wholly and solely to another. But now all was changed; he was free, and there was no sin nor wrong to friendship in striving to win for herself the priceless love that Katie had flung away. She pictured the halcyon life that was dawning even now before her vision. Ah! she thought, could she but let him see how utterly she had yielded up her heart to him, without outraging her notions of womanly delicacy and modest reserve!

Sutton broke in suddenly upon the pleasant little reverie into which she had fallen.

‘Miss Barrington, I am going to ask

you something to which I have never had the nerve to allude hitherto. And yet a great strong fellow like me ought to have nerve enough for anything, I suppose. Well, we are all apt to fail sometimes, and when the dearest and deepest feelings of a man's heart are concerned, his courage is scarcely at its highest.' And George gave a short laugh, that ended in a sigh that sounded rather hopeless.

Blanche listened to him mute as a statue. It appeared to her as if a bright gleam of sunshine flashed across her eyes, opening a glimpse of heaven. She stood awaiting the momentous question with a trepidation that brought the warm colour flickering all over her face, while her limbs trembled and her pulsation grew fast.

Was it coming already, she wondered, the seal of her life's happiness, the question that she had not dreamed of hearing so soon; the 'something' which, once asked

and granted, would give her the right she yearned for?—to be able to share his fortunes and his griefs, no matter how fickle the first or how weighty the last.

George had found out at length that one heart worshipped him truly, although another woman had scorned and rejected him, and he was on the eve of rewarding her long-tried constancy and devotion.

Her lips quivered visibly, but no sound issued from them. Only her eyes looked up at him lovingly and gratefully, nay, there was almost an expression of pleading in them, as though she would fain beseech of him, if she dared, not to delay the certain knowledge of her infinite bliss, and to end at once and for ever the cruel misgivings and suspense, and the harrowing fears, that had often tortured her breast.

‘Miss Barrington!’

It was a very cold beginning, truly, to a declaration of passion, and scarcely the

fashion of address that any woman would have expected from an eager suitor; but the tone in which the name was uttered was low and broken, yet impressive, and Blanche did not grieve at his mode of speaking, so long as in his heart he felt fondly towards her. In spite of the formal appellation, she hearkened to his voice with strained ears, and with hope bounding high within her.

‘I *must* speak, although perhaps I ought not to do so; but my very soul hungers for the knowledge of something, which you alone can satisfy. My dreams by night, my every thought by day, is of one person. O, if you could only guess how deeply I love her!’

Blanche clasped her two little white hands firmly together in her deep thankfulness, and shot up a silent prayer to Heaven, whilst a sparkling smile of happiness irradiated her features like a glory.

But Sutton seemed to be gazing out earnestly on the starlit rippling ocean, and

all the beauty and bloom that joy had lent to her face was lost upon him entirely.

‘Yes,’ he murmured, never turning towards her, ‘you alone can tell me all I desire to know; and if you could divine a millionth portion of the suspense and misery I suffer, you would pardon my speaking on a subject that perhaps I ought not to touch upon at all, and at any rate not until we know more of each other.’

While he spoke there was deprecation in his accents, but no passion in his glance. She never noticed the ill-omen, but she only wondered at his blindness. The chief feeling in her mind was one of astonishment that he should for an instant doubt the fact that anything he asked of her would be unsatisfactorily answered.

She dared not look up, fearing lest he should read her answer in her eyes, before even his lips had framed the momentous query.

She leant beside him, very white and still, with an irrepressible trembling all over her, but feeling unutterably blest. And rapt in a bright picture of a life that would be paradisaical, she was recalled to a sense of being a miserable mortal with earth's bitterest troubles as her birthright. She was awakened to a knowledge that her heart, with all its wealth of unselfish affection, was not only hurled back on itself, but rejected in a spirit of unconscious indifference that made the rejection doubly galling to bear. The only voice that *could* speak happiness to her, and to which she had never listened without a thrill through every vein, was speaking in her ears, rapidly and passionately in eager pleading, and the theme it dilated on was 'love'—love long-enduring and never-ending; but a love that was not for her!

'Tell me, for God's sake, is she, whom I still worship more than my life, whom I never,

never can forget, is she well and—happy?" And this last word was whispered almost inaudibly, as Sutton, oblivious in the tumult of his own feelings and memories, bent towards her and grasped tight hold of two ice-cold hands.

She shivered and shrank away from his clasp, and paled an ashy whiteness beneath the soft moonlight.

Then there came a short silence, during which she breathed a hasty prayer for strength—strength to enable her to see with tearless eyes her glorious stronghold of bliss crumble away in nothingness before her; she prayed for courage to keep a brave appearance whilst her poor heart was faint and sick unto death.

After a minute or so she spoke to him, and to his hearing there was not the smallest perceptible tremor in her accents, although there was a big choking ball in her throat, and a leaden weight upon her spirit

that seemed to grow heavier and heavier each instant.

‘If you are speaking of Katie, Mr. Sutton, she is quite well’ (she would not say ‘happy,’ for fear of wounding him by the word). ‘I did not know you were so anxious to hear of her, or I would have shown you her last letter,’ she managed to utter steadily, but with an inflexion of mortification in her tone.

‘May I see it?’ he exclaimed passionately. ‘Katie is another man’s wife, it is true, and she ought to be nothing to me. I ought not even to speak of her, perhaps, according to the code of strict morality; but I did not think you were one to be down on a fellow for such a trifling dereliction of decorum. I beg your pardon, Miss Barrington, for speaking of my feelings, and I will not offend you again.’

And he turned away coldly and almost angrily from her, vexed with himself for

having exposed the tender spot in his soul to unsympathising eyes.

How wofully he misunderstood the heart that never dreamt of scorning or scoffing at his love for a married woman, but which was bleeding inwardly at the blow so freshly dealt to itself!

At his gesture of annoyance all remembrance of self flew away. George had aimed a barbed arrow at her breast with a cold and callous hand, but she could never bear to wound or anger him.

She recollected that, although he did not care for her, he was beside her and in grief.

With the sudden demolition of all her fairy visions, a sort of recklessness stole over her that rendered her to a certain extent indifferent as to whether he divined her suffering or not.

She knew now that she was nothing whatever to him, and that she could never

deceive herself more. All she longed for was to try and comfort him—to pour balm upon his sore heart, if it was in her power to do so; but she scarcely knew what to say or how to console him. She was so thoroughly simple and unworldly, that she was quite devoid of the tact by which an older and more experienced woman would have drawn him from out of his sorrow.

‘Pray do not give way! please do not!’ she implored of him just in the coaxing beseeching tones of a little child. She knew that when she was in trouble she went down on her knees and breathed an earnest prayer, and rose up happier and easier always for having done so; so, judging by herself, she whispered softly, ‘God will give you strength to bear up against any sorrow, and He will give you back hope and energy and even happiness, if you will only ask Him. I wish I could comfort you. I would give the world to be able to do so.’

Her true sympathy touched him so, that the ice in which he had enveloped his soul for a moment melted away, and bowing his head down on his hands, he murmured hoarsely, 'I should not speak of her now to any one, but I love her so dearly, so wildly still! O, forgive me for giving way like this, but it maddens me to live in utter ignorance of her well-being, *never* to hear of her from living lips!'

She stole a soft little palm into his, and drew away his hands, and an angel face shone down upon him, full of pity. The sight comforted him evidently, for he smiled up gratefully as he met her eyes. 'You are very good to bear with me so, and your words have made me less unhappy already. I am so glad my unmanly grief has not roused your contempt. Somehow my spirits feel lighter since I have found out that there is one heart that feels sincerely for me. God bless you for your kindness, Blanche!'

It was the first time her Christian name had fallen from his lips, and she started at the novel sound. She could say no more—her heart was so full of misery; so, smiling sadly at him, she stole away to her cabin and cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER III.

NISI DOMINUS FRUSTRA.

‘Like ships that sail’d for sunny isles,
But never came to shore.

Nail to the mast her holy flag ;
Set every threadbare sail ;
And give her to the God of storms,
The lightning, and the gale.’

THE yellow moon, like the chasteest of maidens, had closely veiled her face behind a big white fleecy cloud, when the loiterers that had held gay converse on the decks of the Sea Queen one by one sought their cabins, and by the ‘witching hour of midnight’ all on board, save those who formed the ship’s watch, rested quietly in their berths.

None can solve the mysteries of mind or matter, or tell how many of those

calmly slumbering human creatures were lost in pleasant dreams, in which bright angels were perchance their visitants, and a purer and infinitely better world than this their home; but even while they slept and dreamt, angels were expanding their white wings wide to carry disencumbered spirits from the gross earth heavenward!

For in the very midst of that apparently safe and tranquil hour peril was rife, and the dread fiat of human life and death broke loudly from the great Jehovah's lips on mortal ears, in a sudden crash of thunder that seemed to rend the very air, and that startled into wakefulness each being there, between whom and eternity but a frail plank intervened, whilst blinding lightning with vivid gleams lit up the ocean for many a mile with a broad noonday glare, that revealed too well the danger of the scene. The whistle sounded loud and shrill, and in the twinkling of an eye the broad deck

swarmed fast and thick with the startled crew, flying hither and thither to their various tasks.

The sight was grand but terrible!

In a little while the coming tempest began to lash into greater fury the already angry waves, that kept dashing up higher and higher each moment against the heaving vessel. Presently there came a momentary lull, most ominously still, that eased her, but only to feel doubly, as it were, the mountain surges once more sweep violently over her like a deluge, seeming to tear up plank by plank.

‘Rude Boreas, blustering railer,’ ruled right royally overhead. It blew the stiffest, hardest gale that had been felt for many a day, and the huge rollers kept toppling over the ship—each big billow with a crest of thick white foam, as though it was crowned with snow—as their victim swallowed piteously in the trough of sea.

Then the poor Sea Queen began to creak and groan heavily and helplessly, as the ruthless and cruel waters struck hard blows on her again and again, and on the half-clad shivering forms, and the blanched and scared faces of all the trembling women and children that stood huddled closely together, wildly clinging to the ropes and bulwarks in the strong grasp of fear; and over them all a strange awe-stricken silence reigned, unbroken save by a short but frantic prayer that went up now and then from some pallid lip to God.

Driven like chaff before the fury of the elements, the Sea Queen drifted here and there, anywhere and everywhere but in the right course, with the men standing useless and still at the helm.

All at once, through the sullen booming of thunder and the roar of wind and wave, a voice scarcely audible ordered the sounding of the well.

Several feet of water were already there. Every hand that could be spared worked hard and bravely at the pumps, but it was all in vain. Toil and unflagging energy were utterly powerless ; for on a second trial, and after the deck had been hastily cleared of all that could be sent over the reeking sides, the water lay there still in undiminished depths.

The hours grew on, and the gigantic surges never stayed their course, but kept rolling in, in quick succession ; one moment yawning widely asunder, then threatening to close together and to ingulf the labouring ship, that seemed, as it were, to shrink away from them, and to shiver and tremble as the fierce big boulders menacingly approached her.

Heavy black clouds drove swiftly through the starless sky, and the storm waxed more and more violent, showing no abatement in its wrath, while the bulwarks.

dipped deeper and deeper into the boiling brine; the figure-head bowed lower and lower before each wave, and no human voice could be heard amidst the din of the shrieking hurricane. The masts bent backwards and forwards like weak saplings, and round the unfortunate vessel a colossal wall of water appeared to rear itself.

Then came a vivid flash of lightning to reveal a new horror—a beetling rock, with great white breakers roaring beneath, and towards it the Sea Queen, in her unbridled course, too quickly and surely drifting.

Hope died out of the bravest breast at that terrible sight. Inevitable death awaited over a hundred quaking souls.

Struggles for dear life, struggles that had been made with almost superhuman strength, waxed fainter as the ship rushed onwards—onwards, madly careering to her certain doom. On, on she flew! one moment lifted lightly like a huge sea-gull on the

crest of a mountain billow, the next instant staggering and reeling about like a drunkard, or like a living creature convulsed in throes of mortal agony.

Then falling back, back, heavily and hopelessly, into her wide bed of seething surge.

Another shock, another low plunge into the dark turbid depths, with her frame quivering as though it were wrenched asunder, and then a wild unearthly sound, yet a human cry or wail, rang even through the tumult of the pitiless storm.

It was a cry of Fire! A flame had ignited below, and casks of spirits forming a large portion of the cargo, the process of spreading had been but too facile.

Even a watery grave seemed preferable to the horror of being devoured by that awful fiery scourge. A boat was quickly launched by a dozen despairing men, and a rush of affrighted beings made to it.

It filled and foundered, and many an erring soul was sent, in a moment, into eternity.

Then a second boat was lowered, and Sutton, carrying Mrs. Barrington's unconscious form, with Blanche clinging closely to his side, got into it; and these three, with the captain and five sailors, were the only survivors that lived to tell the tale of that terrible night.

It seemed as though Providence had taken pity on the few beings that had miraculously escaped the great jaws of death. For wind and wave suddenly decreased in fury, and the small craft gallantly held her own, and its suffering freight, looking backwards through the pitch blackness, saw an appalling sight indeed.

It was the last of the beautiful Sea Queen; her masts all gone—herself one mass of lurid flame from stem to stern, that, shooting aloft, illuminated for many a

mile the pervading gloom; and before the boat lost its view of the wreck, the ill-fated vessel had burnt down to the water's edge, and billows were rolling and tossing above her!

CHAPTER IV.

PLAYING WITH DANGER.

‘ Misled by fancy’s meteor ray,
By passion driven ;
But yet the light that led astray
Was light from heaven.’

KATIE’S child grew no worse, but neither did it grow any better, as the long summer hours flew past on brilliant wings, yet lagging wearily enough on their course to the poor mother in her deep anxiety. It appeared as though the little one, without suffering from any especial ailment that the highest medical ability to be found in Frankfurt or Homburg could discover, yet refused to thrive in spite of the world of love and tenderness lavished upon it night and day.

Its tiny face grew visibly smaller and smaller, and over the wee waxen-hued brow poor Katie shed floods of bitter tears. She loved her husband very dearly, and her devotion to his child in nowise deteriorated from her attachment to the father; but the baby seemed to have crept into her very life, as it were, and to have become a portion of her being, it had been so completely left to her protection and affection since it had first opened its eyes on the earth, and Denison had in a manner scarcely acknowledged its existence, save by an occasional scowl or an impatient exclamation at any time a cry announced its presence anywhere in his vicinity.

It had come to Katie like a ray of sunshine just in the very time when, disappointed in the love she had hoped to find in Vere, her soul, with a sad aching void within, had craved for something on which she could unrebuked pour out the strong

feelings of tenderness that lived in it—something that would smile and be happy, fostered by her deep love—something that would not fling back her heart upon herself, coldly and cruelly as Denison had done. Those ‘baby fingers’ waxen touches’ had been balm to a wounded spirit many a time, and she had turned away weary and hopeless often, after a cutting gibe or parting lash of the lips from her husband, to find her comfort and happiness in the clinging clasp of two small weak arms. And now she would sit and watch the child for hours, forgetting physical fatigue and never tasting food.

While her mind was tortured by anxiety she fancied she saw her little ray of sunshine fading gradually away farther and farther, until it would soon be quite out of her reach. There was inexpressible agony in the thought; and often catching it from its cradle she would hold it tightly to her,

and, going down on her knees, send up frantic prayers to Heaven to spare the tiny life that was so unspeakable a boon to her. When it slept she would kneel beside it, scanning its features one by one with eager eyes, listening with strained ears to its low breathing, and pressing even the little socks it wore over and over again to her lips. The tiny atom that was nothing to any one else in the world was her whole existence, and she clung to it with all the tenacity of a drowning man to a fragile straw.

After a while the state of its health began to fluctuate, and sometimes the faintest pink would colour its pallid cheek and lip, and a little accession of strength seem to come back to its frame, and then Katie's heart would bound wildly again with hope and earnest thankfulness. All through the gay season at Homburg she had scarcely ventured out of the house or spoken to a human creature save to the old German

nurse, or a word exchanged with Denison late at night on his return home or early in the morning before he sallied out to the rooms.

In point of social advantages Katie might as well have been in a convent, so completely was she tabooed companionship; but, taken up with maternal troubles, she had lost all inclination 'to see and be seen.' The wilds of Siberia would have been as lively an abode as the gayest of German spas was to her.

Confinement and anxiety had done their natural work, and made sad havoc with her personal appearance. She had lost a great deal of the peculiar 'sparkle' that had, perhaps, constituted the greatest charm of her beauty; her face had grown very pale and thin, and she looked very delicate; but it was a long time before Denison's selfish eyes perceived the alteration in her, and even when they did so, it did not appear as

though his heart experienced any remorse for his daily neglect of his ailing wife. He knew she required fresh air and invigorating exercise, but he could not bring himself to give up his diurnal pursuits for the sake of restoring the roses to the white cheeks of the poor little woman pining at home for want of common care and attention. All the time he managed to spare from gambling was entirely devoted to Lady Millicent Leslie, who had persuaded her weak and indulgent husband to allow her to visit Homburg for some weeks, in order that the celebrated springs might effect a cure in some imaginary ailment, with a long Latin name which was quite beyond the comprehension of her spouse. It was enough for him to know that his beautiful ladyship ailed 'something,' to unloose his purse-strings and place all she required to insure luxury at her disposal. The only vexation he felt was that an inconvenient

lawsuit would detain him in London ; and the poor little man would sit quietly and a little sadly at the bow window of a club in St. James's-street, looking out on the painful glare and double-distilled dulness that characterises the great Babylon during the dead season of the year, with a certain loneliness of spirit, and yet with an earnest hope in his heart that his beautiful wife was enjoying herself to the fullest extent, and rapidly regaining her wonted bloom and health, while she inhaled the fresh sweet breezes that swept over the Taunus Hills ; and his desire was gratified, for the Lady Millicent was pleasureing herself to her bent. It was just in the full swing of the *grande saison*, and Homburg was thronged by beauties and notoriety from all quarters of the globe ; but casting into shade the attractions of blonde and brunette, 'Miladi' reigned omnipotent as the belle *par ex-*

cellence; and with her majestic figure and wonder of gold chevelure, and a series of toilettes that were splendid though somewhat *outré*, she formed a focus of attraction for all the idle flutterers in the place. To none of the slaves that worshipped at her shrine of beauty was she so affable as to Vere Denison, probably because he displayed no fervour in the attention which he yet paid her to a certain extent. The truth was, that his feelings were not interested in the smallest degree, nay, had his real sentiments been analysed, they would have been found to be the reverse of complimentary to her; but still he was, it might be unconsciously to himself, slightly flattered at being singled out as the favourite attendant of a magnificent woman, to whom all his sex yielded homage, if not respect. He never sought a place at her side, but he let himself be installed there through her management

and diplomacy full many an hour, when in his soul he sickened at the false and worldly feelings that peeped out at times, in spite of Lady Millicent's efforts to hide her real nature perpetually behind a mask. Vere was too great a worldling himself not to understand a mind so thoroughly akin to his own, or to let escape him gleams of wiliness and duplicity that casual eyes would have failed to discover. It was unloyal to Katie to *affiché* himself, as he was daily doing, with any one so marked and conspicuous as the Lady Millicent ; and had he been brought up in a wholesome and moral school, he would have realised to himself at once the error he had fallen into, even though the appearance of evil was far greater than the reality—for beyond a petty vanity, there really was naught to be cavilled at in the motive for his conduct. Neither love nor passion formed an iota in the matter, and

still he seemed blind to the indiscretion he committed in appearing as the shadow of her substantial ladyship. Denison was the very last man to fall under the influence of any woman, even though she had possessed the loveliness of a houri. His heart was as hard as his feelings were worn out, and it would have been impossible to have roused up in him any lasting affection or devotion. The extreme selfishness of his nature was in itself a barrier against his falling in love, and would have effectually prevented his recognising any interests or comforts above his own; but nevertheless, although he was an unbeliever in the 'divine passion,' it came to him quite naturally to succumb his conscience to a trumpery vanity, the gratification of which was the head and front of his offending against social laws and marital duty. Now and then, disgusted by the utter inanity and frivolity

of his brainless goddess, his thoughts would fly homewards. In fancy he would see a face with eyes from which a 'soul' looked out—not the wide-open, cerulean orbs of a waxen doll, vacant in expression and wearisome to gaze on. And then he would inwardly compare his wife and the Lady Millicent, with a result that would have driven the latter into sore vexation of spirit. Sometimes too, but, alas! not very often, a little feeling of sorrow would steal over him, in spite of all his hardness and callousness, as the recollection of Katie's lonely life would cross his memory, and he would experience a slight remorse for having subjected her to such long absences and such wearisome monotony. But at last even in the crowded rooms, and in the excitement of play, a pair of hazel eyes, heavy-lidded, and a face from which all the bloom of health had gone, rose up reproachfully before

him, and he felt that he could no longer ignore the fact that neglect and want of kindness were doing their best to leave him 'free' again. Cold and cruel perhaps by nature, yet his heart softened as much as it could do at the bare vision of Katie, warm, loving, and leal wife as she was, leaving him to lie in a narrow grave, with the bright sparkle gone out from her sweet face, and the ringing tones of her wonted laugh hushed for ever and aye. His feelings of compunction grew strong upon him, so he determined to make a compact between his inclinations and his conscience. And it was in this wise. He knew that his wife was good and true and pure: cynic though he was, sceptical of worth, an infidel as regarded morality in general, he would have willingly staked his existence that Katie would never by word or look or deed dishonour him or his name, and he felt that he could trust her

fully and freely with any man. But with all this he also knew that Lord Castleton admired her, and that probably, according to the code of existing society, he would avow the admiration he felt for her, if an opportunity for doing so was afforded him. The compact, then, that Denison made within himself was a dishonourable one; for in lieu of guarding his wife from even a breath of evil, he preferred throwing her into danger, and rather than sacrifice his own amusement, he ran the chance of Katie's ears being sullied by a declaration of love from another man.

From him emanated a proposition that Claude, being nothing of a gamester, should be installed in the agreeable office of cicerone to Katie, in the picturesque environs of Homburg; and Claude, but too well pleased and satisfied at the arrangement, threw no obstacles in the way.

The feelings that Katie had inspired,

with certainly neither will nor intention on her part, in Claude, were a strange *mélange* enough.

Up to this time, although he had experienced more 'feverish fancies' than most of his sex, Lord Castleton had never rightly understood the meaning of the word 'love.' But a very short while back, and he would have laughed to scorn the very notion of his falling under the influence of a powerful attachment for a good and honest woman, in whose presence he felt that he would rather die than utter a word that might offend her delicacy, and be much more of an insult than a compliment to a pure and innocent mind.

It quite sufficed for his happiness now to be allowed to look at Katie, and to speak to her—alone and unfettered by the curious gaze of others. He knew that if a casual glance of her eyes, or a transient touch of her hand, brought the warm blood

to his face, that at any rate there would be no one near to note his weakness and to smile at his folly. Claude was very much afraid of the world's laugh, and he looked upon the world's opinion as a much more serious thing than it really is. It was wrong for him to cherish the feelings that had sprung up in his heart; but yet they had worked him good to a certain extent, in fact they had changed his nature as completely as a serpent casts its skin. In the far purer atmosphere that he breathed daily in Katie's society, the noxious one in which he had lived so many years of dissipation and sin was fast losing its once pernicious influence over him; he already began to see more clearly right from wrong, and ceased to palliate evil with false reasoning; he was even not ashamed to own to the possession of that which is so unfashionable nowadays, a conscience. He no longer existed, as of yore, from hour

to hour like a butterfly, tasting ephemeral sweets, and roving perpetually from flower to flower. He had become in a little while a sensible thinking human being, lifted out of his old self of foppery, affectation, and egregious folly by the mighty power of a sincere love, which, restrained by honour and manliness, and guarded by delicacy of feeling, scarcely deserved the name of 'sin,' although its object was not a legitimate one.

Katie herself, strong in an armour of innocence, and confident in her husband's wisdom and discretion, although by this time her eyes might have been fully opened to his lacking those qualities as well as several others with which her girlish love had invested him, gladly acquiesced in the proposal that she should emerge occasionally from her seclusion, and enjoy air and change of scene. Indifferent health had engendered bad spirits, and she felt that

anything that could take away the unwonted depression that weighed down her mind to a most painful degree would be welcome to her.

Since Denison with plausible words had succeeded in persuading her that the fruition of his wondrous system was entirely dependent on his daily attendance at the tables, Katie cared little *who* was to be her escort, so utterly insensible were her feelings towards all but her husband.

Lulled in security—for none could have kept a more stringent guard over eyes and tongue than Lord Castleton in the pleasant excursions in which only an uncouth German servant formed the trio—Katie's spirits grew light again, and under the bright blue sky her face began to sparkle with the brightness of other days, while her laugh rang out fresh and clear with the musical gladness that it used to have before matrimony, with its anxieties and

knocks and brunts, had changed the happy girl into a quiet and disappointed woman.

But such an agreeable state of things could scarcely be expected to endure for long. The summer hours were fleeting by, and the days began to grow shorter and less brilliant, and with the antagonism of weather the drives became fewer and farther between; and then, worst of all, with the change in the year came a change in Claude, a change that he strove to avert, but which he lacked the strength to cope with—a miserable longing, a feverish desire stronger than himself, that impelled him to try and fathom, no matter at what cost, whether beneath the exterior of her whom he thought he loved better than his life, no deeper and warmer feelings lurked towards him, than the cool and calm friendliness which was the only sentiment her habitual manner displayed. Timorous of uttering aught that could in any wise wound

or insult her, he yet longed to let fall a word that might unveil to her the perturbed state of his own heart. He only desired to see if the rose on her soft cheek would deepen at the knowledge of his entire devotion, or if a kindly glance would reveal to him an appreciation of his homage. Katie looked so full of love, so capable of returning affection, that surely, he fancied, she could not be so callous and insensible as she appeared to the madness in his breast.

He could not be wise enough to 'let well alone,' and rest satisfied with the pleasure that her simple companionship gave him. He wanted more than that now! Nothing, it was true, that would in the slightest degree savour of wrong. He would have died rather than have seen his idol lowered in her own self-respect, so pure and sacred a thing she presented to his mind; but he desired to feel that he

was not indifferent in her eyes, that she looked upon him in a nearer light than that of a mere acquaintance. What he yearned so unspeakably to learn was, that if fate had ordained their meeting when Katie was free to love and be won, that she would have cared for him with all the truth and tenderness that he felt for her in his inmost soul.

CHAPTER V.

HE LOVED HER NOT WISELY, BUT TOO WELL.

‘Since sorrow never comes too late,
And happiness too quickly flies,
Where ignorance is bliss,
’Twere folly to be wise.

• • • •
He rather fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch,
To win or lose it all.’

RIGHT away to westward, the pale red beams of the autumnal sun were slowly sinking to rest, and the tall slim trees that skirted both sides of the broad road were shorn of much of their pristine glory, when Claude, with Katie by his side, drove gently down the hilly way that leads into the town of Homburg from a lovely spot, which is considered one of the little sanatariums

of Germany, called Soden. The extremely picturesque surroundings and romantic situations with which it abounds, and which render it a sort of show-place for tourists, might easily have offered temptation for indulging in sentiment; but Lord Castleton during the whole afternoon had kept a strict guard over his tongue, in spite of his desire to fathom his companion's feelings towards him. In truth he was not courageous enough morally to look into Katie's face and give utterance to aught that might evoke a frown on her brow or bring a blush to her cheek; and Katie, thoroughly at her ease, without a thought of guile, seemed blithesome as a bird. Her child was progressing steadily in health and strength, and with the onus of anxiety on his account removed from her heart, the old buoyancy of spirit had returned to her to some extent. Charming as Claude had found her in the guise of *la penserosa*, as

l'allegra she was doubly captivating to him ; and while in ignorance of the havoc she was making in his heart, her sweet eyes flashed brightly upon him, and her voice rang out in snatches of song that to his infatuated ears sounded like magic melody, his breast was warring terribly within. One instant he resolved to approach the subject that engrossed him ; the next moment he shrank from the dangerous experiment, knowing that the smallest repulse would hurt him and occasion infinite unhappiness.

All his life he had been pampered and petted by the fair sex, and fed on honeyed smiles and looks, until, like other sweets, they had created a nausea which made him recoil from them with a greater disgust at times than they merited. He had begun, long before he reached the age of twenty-seven years, to regard women as so many glittering baits held out for men's de-

struction. Fair beings with golden locks presented to him Lurleys ; dark beauties, with laughing eyes like diamonds and raven tresses, called up visions of Delilah. His natural temperament was warm, frank, and noble enough ; but intercourse with the world and association with a type of humanity that was not of the highest had warped his opinions considerably, and made him apt to a hard scepticism that marred his character. Tolerant of faults in his own sex, to women he was harsh in judgment, and liable to imagine flaws that at times did not exist. He fancied them usually avaricious, grasping, and wily ; but the idea had simply been engendered by an acquaintance with harpies of Schmerzundweh's calibre. Denison's wife, pure as a lily, modest as a violet, and yet proud as a queen, was a mixture of human mould that was new to him, and forthwith he had bowed down and worshipped what he felt to be a *rara avis*.

As the day-beams declined, and the shadows of evening came slanting across the road, Claude's courage appeared to rise higher. Under the protection of the dusk he gathered up the resolution that had utterly failed him all day. He determined to elicit Katie's sentiments towards him ere the drive was at an end, even at the risk, that by his own misdoing he and she might never again be alone together.

He turned and looked at her, and felt his hardihood waver as those candid hazel eyes returned his gaze pleasantly, but in childlike innocence. But an evil spirit was prompting him on, and even that angelic expression, full of purity and goodness, was completely powerless to restrain him. Suddenly he dropped the reins, and seizing her hand, he faced her steadily for a minute or so in silence, while she stared at his action in wonderment, but with no alarm depicted on her countenance. Flirtation,

much less sin, was far from her thoughts ; her whole soul was her husband's ; and she never dreamed that she had reached the prologue of a thrilling drama of pathos and passion. She let Claude retain his grasp, and never even tried to shake it off. But before in her astonishment at his conduct she had time to question it, he began to speak, and his voice had a tone in it that struck her as strange. Nevertheless, the words that began to fall more rapidly from his lips came upon her at the last like a thunderbolt.

All his pathos and passion were at fault to move her with even an emotion of pity ; nay, for the first time, she shivered and shrank away from him in undisguised dislike. Could it be really true, she questioned herself, that she had voluntarily placed herself in a position to be thus insulted ? Had she unconsciously shown so little of the deep and exquisite devotion she bore her

husband, that any man should presume to soil her ears and infringe on that husband's honour, by daring not only to avow love to her, but to ask for a return? She felt that she could have bowed her head down and cried out loud for very shame and anger; and as his words fell upon her, she longed to stop her ears from listening to them.

‘Mrs. Denison! Katie!—she flashed at him wrathfully as he spoke her Christian name, but in the tumult of his own feelings he did not notice her glance—‘this may be almost the last time of meeting you alone. Forgive me, if I am wrong—if I annoy you; but I cannot help it. I must tell you that I love you, that I never loved any one before I met you—that I shall never love any one but you so long as I live!'

And Claude, with both her hands tightly held within his own strong clasp, breathless

and frightened at his own temerity, bent beseeching eyes upon her, and strove to discover some compassion, a little relenting in the beautiful face that looked so proud and white in the shimmering dusk, but in vain; there were no signs of softening, no lines of indecision to be read in those features by the most skilful of physiognomists; only a scornful quiver on a pair of curved red lips, a lightning gleam of anger in startled eyes, while two tiny hands, with a sudden accession of strength, wrencheded themselves from a hold that stung like a serpent's sting. There was no affectation of prudery, no acting in the action. Claude felt instinctively that his touch was loathsome to her, and his words an insult her wounded pride would never forget or forgive.

‘ You are angry with me! You hate me! I have been a dolt—an idiot, not to know that you only regarded me as an

acquaintance—useful and nothing more!' he exclaimed bitterly in deep mortification, whilst his heart swelled high with vexation and unhappiness; but he could not help loving her infinitely more in her virtue and disdain than he had ever done before. A conciliatory word, a glance bordering on coquetry on her part would have gone a long way to dispel his fancy; it would have levelled her from the pedestal on which he had placed her, to his usual standard of women. He would willingly have surrendered half his princely fortune at that moment for the guerdon of a forgiving glance, an assurance ever so trifling that though he had behaved madly, sinfully, and had excited her inmost wrath, he had not called up in her mind utter dislike, or, worst of all, contempt.

‘Speak to me, Mrs. Denison, I implore you! Tell me that I have not offended you beyond recall. O, do speak my par-

don, if you can bring yourself to say nothing kinder. You do not know how inexpressibly mean and pitiful I feel at having taken advantage of your goodness in intrusting yourself to my care, to annoy you thus ! Pray forgive me, and believe that I shall never dare to breathe a word to you again that all the world may not hear!"

Katie surveyed him quietly. She was calmer and more able to judge whether Claude had been base enough to presume on a *tête-à-tête*, or whether he had been led away on the impulse of the hour into uttering words that he knew were best avoided. His genuine contrition was to be traced easily on his face, and it showed itself in the humble inflexion of his voice, and in the increased respect of his manner. She could not help being a little sorry that prudence and reason had not restrained him from speaking, both for his sake and

her own; and with a feeling of delicacy that revolted from making into a serious matter, a subject into which she shrank from entering, she essayed to treat it in the light of a folly or a mistake.

‘I forgive you, Lord Castleton; you have been joking, I am sure;’ and she tried hard to laugh off her embarrassment, but she caught sight of Claude’s pained expression, and her attempt at hilarity was a poor one. She went on kindly but earnestly:

‘It is I who am to blame in the matter, and not you, I am afraid. I must have been very indiscreet and foolish for you to have imagined for one moment that flirtation, however harmless, was in my line. Any encouragement you may have fancied has been very involuntary on my part, for indeed I never dreamt of doing or saying aught that could mislead you. I am an old married woman now, you know, Lord Castleton, and quite countri-

fied and unfashionable enough to confess without a blush that my husband has the whole of my heart safe in his own keeping. We will forget all about this evening, and be careful to avoid dangerous conversations in future, I think.'

'Forget my folly—my insanity, if you will, but do not be relentless; let me see you sometimes. Do not deny me a chance of trying to reinstate myself in your good opinion,' pleaded Claude with all the piteousness he could infuse into his accents. But Katie was not one to be persuaded into playing with harm.

'No, it is better not,' she answered determinedly enough to quench any hope he might have had of softening her. 'But we will be good friends still, although you have wounded my pride and self-respect terribly, and made me feel very small in my own eyes!' And giving him just the tips of her fingers, she murmured a cold

‘good-night,’ and left him directly she reached home.

She flung herself into an easy-chair in her own room, and tried to compose herself to think; but her thoughts were far from pleasant ones. She began to dissect in memory, as well as she was able, word by word, all she had ever spoken to Lord Castleton, wondering what levity on her part could have elicited a ‘declaration;’ but she could recollect no sentence or action in the course of her acquaintance with him that could be blamed by the most prudish and censorious. Her whole heart was full of Vere, and she knew that neither in spirit nor letter had she broken the faith she had sworn to her husband, or the loyalty she owed him.

With all her faults of inconstancy towards George Sutton, her sentiments to Denison were purest fidelity in thought, deed, and language; and to her mind, the

insult of having her love for him doubted for one moment, was far worse a thousand-fold than any unkindness received from himself. She could not help regretting that any man existed upon earth with such audacity in his composition as to imagine that she, Denison's wife, could forget herself and good taste so entirely as to prefer him to her husband. And above all, she was sorely vexed that Lord Castleton had burdened her with a secret; for she did not care to tell Vere of the conversation in that hateful drive, only to hear him laugh at her 'absurd prudery,' and to know that his affection for her was not strong or fervid enough to cause him even a twinge of jealousy.

CHAPTER VI.

SICK UNTO DEATH.

‘ O woman, in our hours of ease
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
And variable as the shade
By the light quivering aspen made,
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou !’

THE few survivors of the lost Sea Queen, after buffeting for eight-and-twenty hours with uproarious wind and waves, were spared at any rate a grave in the fathomless deep. Their sufferings were, however, not only severe, but almost unbearable, from the awful prospect that every billow which rocked them on its swelling crest would probably be the precursor to eternal rest. Towards break of day the tumult of the elements gave promise of subsiding;

the roaring blast grew lower, the pealing thunder waxed fainter and fainter, the rain-drops decreased in size, and even a few blue specks became discernible in the sky, whilst across the horizon, an emblem of safety and hope, pale rainbow hues met the sight of the wave-tossed creatures, whose hearts had well-nigh yielded up all thoughts of freedom from their perilous position. But a mighty hand had indeed presided at the helm, and guided the brave little craft towards help.

As the gray dawn deepened into the red light of day, a large trader espied the little dark boat on the surface of the white ocean, and hastened to its rescue from the yawning jaws of death, and the humane crew, although composed of rough unpolished men, plunged heart and soul into the task of succouring the wretched sufferers. All were in a pitiable plight, drenched to the skin, and faint for want of sustenance

during all the long and terrible hours that a fragile plank had been their only protection from danger. With pallid set features and throbbing breasts that could with difficulty yet realise that peril was past, they were taken on board the friendly vessel, looking like pale ghosts of themselves. Luxury or even common comfort was scarcely to be expected in the haven of safety they had found ; but after the fearful hardship they had gone through, the small mean cabin of the Mary Jane, bound for Madras from Singapore, and laden with spices and rice, bore a para-disaical aspect to them. Dry garments and coarse nourishment were godsends indeed, and accepted with sincerest gratitude. It was on the fourth morning after the wreck of the beautiful Sea Queen that the ship neared Madras, and with feelings akin to rapture they looked on terra firma once again.

A long unbroken line of flat sands met their eye, almost on a level with the water, and entirely unrelieved but by a low hillock or a stiff Palmyra tree rearing itself up here and there against the horizon, upon a most uninviting and unpicturesque shore. Now and then in the yellow sunlight flashed the long spire of a church, or the white glistening roofs of government buildings and private residences, and on one side out upon the sands loomed a high quaint-shaped lighthouse.

The sea looked very gray and dull, except where the surf rose darkly up, falling again with a gruff murmur, while the spray sprang lightly upwards.

The grand waves, meeting one another, appeared to kiss for a moment, and then to separate as if in a sudden fit of anger, sending up ebullitions of wrath in feathery foam that had a thousand prismatic shades in it, as it leapt up beneath the sunbeams,

and made the roistering billows, for miles and miles along, one sheet of phosphoric splendour.

The vessel, as she made a way for herself through the yielding waves, left behind her a track of snowy white, which the glorious sun touched with radiance, until it appeared like a trace of liquid light narrowing to the merest thread of gold. The riding in a tiny boat on the head of the heavy surf, although not agreeable by any means, was a mere bagatelle to all that had gone before, and once more they put foot on ground.

Madras had not been their original destination; but Major Barrington, whose health had been failing for some months, and who had procured 'sick leave' from his duty with his regiment, was fortunately on the spot, to meet his nearly lost wife and child, for the purpose of taking them for the period of the trying hot sea-

son to the cool and pleasant Neilgherry Hills,—the sanatarium of 'Madrasees.' In spite of the dangers of the past—and they had been surely sufficient to shake a braver spirit than weak little Blanche's, she was experiencing very great unhappiness at this particular time. Even the joy of meeting her father again, after so lengthy an absence—her dear father, whose spoilt darling she had always been, and to whom she was all in all, a pearl of inestimable price that he held as his most precious possession within the strong tower of his heart—was damped considerably by the knowledge that in a short week—a week whose hours, nay whose very minutes, she was perpetually counting with a dull thud on her spirits that reached downright pain—George, the first love of her life, would leave her, and that the time of their separation would be left to the uncertain hand of fortune.

Sutton, on reaching Madras, had immediately engaged a passage in a vessel sailing for the City of Palaces. He was anxious to arrive there, in order that his thoughts might have more agreeable occupation than a miserable retrospection that was not only futile, but which unmanned him at length to an extent of which he was ashamed ; and yet he did not anticipate happiness or pleasure in the monotonous routine of Calcutta life, with up-hill work and uncertain reward for his exertion and trouble awaiting him.

Perhaps if he had quietly sat down and catechised himself, and analysed each secret feeling, he would have discovered another motive that urged him to go on his way without any farther delay than was positively necessary.

He loved Katie dearly, nay madly, still ; he always thought of her, and talked to her, when he was alone, as 'Katie.' As

‘Mrs. Denison’ she never presented herself to him, although there was not an hour of the day, nor a dream in the night, in which she did not live close to his heart in imagination ; but, notwithstanding his unswerving fidelity to the sole mistress his soul had recognised, there was a certain tender pity for his companion in peril whose blue eyes had for ever gone out lovingly towards him, beneath the wildest skies and amidst the deadliest danger. He was wise enough to know that absence was the most probable cure for her, and that Time with his healing wings would prove the most efficient physician to restore a healthy tone to her mind, and fill her heart with its wonted lightness. His presence, he felt, but aggravated evil, and tortured in reality her to whom he gave kindness and compassion, but not love.

And Blanche tried to call womanly pride and proper strength to her aid, so

that she might bear up well and wear a brave countenance while her heart was nigh to breaking; but it was with difficulty that she could force back the tears that burnt her eyelids, or stifle the sobs that choked her throat, as the date of Sutton's departure drew very near. She dared not betray her inward misery to her parents, feeling keenly a maidenly shame at having given away her affection unasked; but down upon her bended knees, with her fair young head pressed tightly upon her pillow, the poor child wept and prayed fervently for strength and resignation. Never for one moment did a thought of blame towards her unresponsive idol cross her brain; no shadow of wounded dignity or anger at his want of reciprocity could have been traced in her sentiments towards him. Hers was true woman's love, given fully, freely, and unreservedly. All he did was right, and all he said was wise. She never questioned

for an instant the probity of his motives, or set herself up as a judge of his conduct; but she loved him always, ardently, blindly perhaps, and without any idea of requital.

Since that moonlit evening on board the Sea Queen, when not his lips only, but his very soul, had spoken of Katie, she had never cherished any more delusions or hugged such vain and fickle guests as hope and happiness in her bosom. She only felt that while George was by her side life was not only bearable, but beautiful, and that when he was gone away the light would die out of sunshine, and the bloom from every flower.

He had promised to pass the last two days of his stay in Madras with the Barringtons, having been pressed to do so by the old sabreur himself, who, honest-hearted and frank in speech, fancied he had encountered a kindred spirit in George, and

had taken a strong predilection for him. Ignorant of Sutton's antecedents with regard to Katie, there was a great desire on his part to throw him and Blanche as much as possible together, in the fancy that by doing so he would gain for himself a son-in-law fashioned exactly to his taste. With the keen perception that appertains to affection even in the dullest people, he had divined the secret that his child persuaded herself she had kept closely locked away from others' view.

Like most who have sojourned for long years in the East, where a breath of air close upon daybreak, before Phœbus has begun his travels in the sky, is a luxury that in a fervid climate is not easily to be relinquished, Major Barrington was a very early riser; and on the morning that Sutton was expected to partake of 'small breakfast,' according to Anglo-Indian phraseology, he was up betimes to receive his

guest; but noonday came, and he was still an absentee.

Donning a 'sola' hat with a white 'pughree' folded round it, and with a 'Mull' servant holding a large leaf umbrella over him, he sallied forth to the house of an affluent Madras official, under whose roof Sutton had found shelter and welcome with the cordiality that distinguishes residents in India.

George lay on his bed, suffering from a severe attack of fever and ague, a complaint that is so often prevalent in oriental countries during the sultry period of the year. Towards evening the fever predominated greatly, and by night he was rolling and tossing about in delirium, predisposed to severe illness by the wet and exposure he had had for so many hours in the boat.

'Likely to be a very serious case indeed!' was the alarming verdict issued from the doctor's lips that met poor Blanche's

ears the next day as she entered the sick-room. Her father had brought her there, knowing full well that a little womanly tending was worth all the vigilant male nursing in the world.

But she neither fainted nor gave utterance to the fear that knocked loudly at her heart. She only stole up noiselessly and with trembling limbs to George's side, and bent down anxiously over him.

His thick brown hair was all rough and untidy, the honest brown eyes were wandering and bloodshot, and the face was flushed and pale by turns, but to Blanche his beauty was unchanged. Her demigod lay before her helpless, struck down in the zenith of his strength, weak as an infant, and she worshipped him with a greater worship, if possible, than she had ever felt before. Now that he was all unconscious, she could for the first time gaze upon him, with eyes flooded with the lovelight

that she durst not let fall upon him before. If she had but been alone with him, she knew that she could not have resisted praying audibly for the precious life that lay in jeopardy there ; but as it was, she was fain content to send up a silent supplication to heaven for her dear love's safety. She smoothed his pillow and his locks, and gently wetted his fever-parched lips and burning palms, and after a while she had her reward in seeing that her small services had been beneficial ; although from the dry lips that she had striven to cool, low and disjointed words were issuing every now and then, so inaudibly and unintelligibly that she could not glean their purport, but once the name of 'Katie' met her ear. It was enough, for it told her at once whose image reigned throughout the feverish dreams, whose memory lived through both delirium and pain !

The passage to Calcutta was of neces-

sity forfeited, and day by day rolled its course, bringing but slow amendment to Sutton's health and strength. Mrs. Barrington forgot her languor for a while in her anxiety and interest for the invalid; and Blanche kept watch both night and day, unconscious of physical fatigue, strong in her self-devotion.

At last, after a hard struggle of many weeks, an iron constitution and youth gained the contest with grim Death, and George Sutton awoke one morning in his right senses and out of danger, to find himself, like a second Samson, shorn of his thick locks, and to see a thin and pallid visage mirrored in the clear depths of a pair of blue orbs that danced gladly at the first signs of his recovery. His pulse was low and fluttering like a woman's, and his strong lips trembled as he strove to speak; but the fever that had scorched his veins and played sad havoc with him was gone,

and with it the inexpressible fear Blanche had experienced all through his illness.

It was infinite music to Blanche to listen to his voice once more, speaking rationally and naturally, to hear him thank her in little low words of gratitude for the care that she had taken of him.

‘O, Blanche, what an angel you are !’ he said in all sincerity and earnestness, while his hand, so white and wan, went out to grasp hers and to hold it very closely; and she never dreamt of resisting, feeling that his touch lifted her into heaven.

She could have knelt by his side for ever, to know that all the while he was full of kindly thoughts for her, and that none but herself was blest with the inestimable privilege of waiting upon him. She was not aware that many a time, when he lay thus apparently unconscious, but in reality only too ill and weak to evince symptoms of vitality, that he had covertly

watched her flitting like a sprite about his room, hanging like a guardian spirit over his bed of sickness, showing the mighty depth of her love in a mouth that trembled at his suffering, in radiant smiles that beamed on her mobile features when health and strength began to visit him again. It pained him unutterably to know that friendship and gratitude were all that he could give her ; and yet with the strange perversity of human nature, although he did not love her, he had begun to feel a dread of leaving her, and going on his way, lonely and uncared for.

CHAPTER VII.

FIDELIS AD URNAM.

‘They sin who tell us love can die,
Its holy flame for ever burneth ;
From heaven it came, to heaven returneth.
Too oft on earth a troublous guest,
At times received, at times oppress’d,
It here is tried and purified,
In heaven it hath its perfect rest ;
It soweth here with grief and care,
But the harvest time of love is there.’

It was noonday, and the sun was shining down with true tropical ardour upon the low thatched roof and plastered walls of the bungalow in which the Barringtons were located, and to which George Sutton had removed in the first stage of convalescence.

The fierce hot winds were whistling and groaning loudly, and sending up heaps of blinding sand through the atmosphere. All

vegetation bore a parched appearance, and human beings gasped for a breath of cool air to reinvigorate exhausted nature; and it was only towards the eventide that the inhabitants of Madras could look for any amelioration in the temperature, when the fresh sea-breeze would set in towards land.

Inside the bungalow, in spite of Madras being deficient to a certain extent in civilisation, there were visible traces of skilful and tasteful feminine fingers in the manifold trivialities that contribute to comfort, and which only a woman's touch can contrive to conjure up within the most dreary and barest of dwellings.

Up like the lark at peep of day, Blanche, long before the hour when others were stirring, had arranged and beautified the sitting-room appropriated to George's especial use, until, notwithstanding the stifling weather and the utter absence of European luxuries, the place presented a pleasant and even

elegant aspect. The green venetians were carefully turned to tone down the yellow glare to a soft and mellow light; flacons of perfume scented the room, and every available glass or vase was heaped over with rich and fragrant roses that grew lavishly and wildly round the house.

Blanche herself, in a dress light as a zephyr's wing, and with her long hair wreathed into a golden coronet on her white brow, looked as lovely as Correggio's Madonna, and as pure and good.

She sat with a volume in her lap, on which her eyes were bent steadfastly; but in truth, her mind was not taking in much instruction or amusement from the pages before her. Mechanically she turned over the leaves, and then she caught sight of a sentence or two, but her thoughts were not in her studies. Demure and quiet as a mouse apparently, she yet stole covert and frequent glances at her companion, who,

still devoid of strength, and partially an invalid, lay on a couch pale and silent for some time.

The covert looks she had cast had depressed her greatly. She could not but perceive that, in spite of vigilant care and nursing, it would be a very long while before Sutton would regain elasticity of frame and his wonted health.

‘Blanche!’ He had grown to calling her quite naturally now by her christian name. The formal appellation of ‘Miss Barrington’ was a thing of the past. Yet his lips never uttered ‘Blanche,’ but the sound sent a thrill through her, and called up a sweet pink flush upon her face.

‘Yes!’ she answered, and even in the inflection of that one little monosyllable there was a world of tenderness. And she flew like lightning to his side, and leant over him in her anxiety to do his smallest behest. This was the happiest period of

her existence. She desired no greater bliss than to be able to wait upon him, and to know that he was dependent upon her for care and comfort. Somehow, either from companionship in danger and trouble, that so rapidly familiarises people, or from an incipient wish to raise no barriers between Sutton and Blanche, her parents had in some degree overstepped the bounds of strict *convenances* in leaving her so much alone with George.

He seemed naturally to have become her especial charge during his illness and convalescence, and many hours of the day were passed in *tête-à-têtes* which might have been an imprudent indulgence under other circumstances.

But Blanche was purity itself without a thought of evil in her soul. And Sutton—any woman lovely as an angel would have been safe with him, with the image of his first love ever present to his eyes, shielding

his heart from any attack of Cupid, and blinding his vision to all other charms but her own.

‘What is it? can I do anything for you, or get you anything?’ Blanche asked, looking round inquiringly at the numerous little delicacies provided by her mother’s forethought for the fastidious palate of an invalid.

Sutton shook his head in the negative; he had no appetite, and the sight of the comestibles was even obnoxious to him.

The girl stood quietly and patiently by until he should tell her what he desired.

‘I want nothing to eat,’ he said languidly, with half-closed eyes; then in a minute or two he turned half round on the sofa and looked up into her face.

‘I only want you to sit here and talk to me for a little while.’

Obedient as a slave to his slightest wish, she drew a chair beside him, and taking

from off the table a large fan made of the fragrant grass called 'Khus Khus' and sprinkling water upon it, she began waving its delicious coolness over him. 'Are you really better to-day?' she questioned him softly, passing her hand gently over his forehead as she spoke, to mark if no trace of fever lingered in his veins. If he had been her own brother, the action could not have emanated from a purer source. George lay quite still; he could not help thinking that it was very pleasant and soothing to feel that soft, cool, little palm upon the brow that had not entirely ceased yet to throb and pain him.

'Much better, thanks to God and to you!' he replied gratefully. 'But though infinitely better physically, I am far worse mentally.'

'Why?' she exclaimed, in undisguised alarm, while terrible visions of a return of delirium presented themselves to her ima-

gination. ‘Why should you be unhappy or depressed, now that you are stronger and on the fair road to health?’

‘Because now that I am so much better, I must think of going away. I must leave Madras,—and you, Blanche! You who have been so good to me—whose kindness I can never forget or repay!’

She turned her head hastily away from him as he said all this; but she could not, with all the efforts she called to her aid, stay the large tears that fell one after another down her cheeks, until at last one bigger than the rest fell upon Sutton’s hand that he had stretched out to take hers with the affectionate action of a brother.

‘What, crying, Blanche!’ he exclaimed with an unrestrainable little tremor in his own voice. Severe illness had divested him of some of his usual nerve, and the knowledge of the girl’s sorrow cut him to

the heart. He knew that he was very wrong in even noticing her tears, since it was not his province to dry them, as an accepted lover would have done; but he felt so sorry for her, that he could not control an expression of sympathy; and more than this, an indefinable impulse that he scarcely understood himself appeared to draw him on, although he knew that it was worse than cruel to probe a wound he durst not heal.

‘You *do* care for me just a little, Blanche, and you will be really and truly grieved to say good-bye to me?’

He wanted so much to hear some one say that his presence was pleasant, since *she* had sent him away from her without one little word of kindness, or one line of regret, that he forgot kindness once in a way, in a sort of selfishness which, however, was pardonable considering the laceration of feeling that Katie had caused him.

The corners of the rosy mouth twitched painfully, and the tiny cold fingers closed and unclosed nervously upon his own. And the poor little heart beat high and loudly ; but not a syllable issued from her lips — nay every now and then she pressed down her under lip tightly with her white teeth, to prevent herself from sending up the cry that seemed to be struggling for utterance. But there was not the smallest need for her to speak.

Like a pitying fowler watching with an experienced eye the dying throes of a bird within his grasp, Sutton read all the anguish in the girl's bosom as plainly as if she had poured out the terrible burden of her sorrow in a tide of eloquence.

‘ Dear Blanche ! ’

It was all over ; at the word of affection that had fallen from his lips, she could fight no longer with pride or reserve. A little golden head fell forwards

upon his breast, and a heart fluttered wildly against his own, and a pair of lips suddenly pressed themselves against his coat.

He let the poor child lay there in her utter abandonment for a little while, whilst he stroked her dishevelled hair caressingly. Then he gently raised her face away from him, and wiped her flushed cheeks that burnt a still deeper red as she caught his pitying gaze.

‘Blanche!’ he whispered, when she grew a little calmer and stronger-hearted, ‘I care for you too, but as if you were a darling little sister! You know the past; but you cannot know how vividly that past lives in my memory—that it will never die until *I* die! When Katie left me for another man, she left my heart to starve to death as it were. I can never love another woman; for night and day, every hour of my life, my thoughts are

of her, and her face is ever before me. In the lonely watches I hear her laugh, in my dreams I hang upon her smiles. I shall never forget her but in my grave. If I had never known her, and learnt to adore her, Blanche, I might, nay I *should*, have worshipped you; but you are too beautiful, too perfect, to be insulted by the offer of a hand, when the earnest and ardent love that is your right cannot be offered as well. O, do not hate me for saying all this; and do not discard me from your friendship, even if I dare not ask for more from you; but look kindly upon me still, and pity me from your soul, Blanche, that fate has denied me the infinite happiness that I might have had with you.'

Not a word in reply—only a little low gasping sigh now and then met his ears. But he could say nothing to comfort her; he could only trust that this would

heal the wound he had involuntarily inflicted.

‘When do you think of leaving Madras?’ she said at last in a little choking tone that went right to his heart.

Since Katie’s cruel defalcation he had become somewhat of a misogynist, sceptical of woman’s faith and truth, and unbelieving in feminine worth; but somehow that little husky voice, replete with sincerity and pain, appeared to revolutionise his sentiments, and caused him to believe once more that truth did exist upon this earth, though it might be a rare article. The poor little girl by his side had unconsciously taken the place of champion of her sex, and by the innocent display of her feelings had brought back the infidel into the right fold.

Women alone are considered to possess a foolish leaning for generalities, but there are many men who denounce the whole

of the fair sex as false, treacherous, and worthless, from the fact of having found one very black sheep in their path through life.

Blanche was braver now that the first ebullition of grief was spent, but she could not help feeling rather doubtful as to how long she would be able to sustain a calm exterior.

Miserable as the prospective parting would be, her heart yearned for a termination to the period of painful fortitude which she would be forced to support in the presence of Sutton.

‘In another ten days, I think, if I progress as well as I am doing now. And, Blanche, my child, you will write to me sometimes surely? and later, you will be telling me that some one—*the* one—has appeared whom you love very much;’ and he caught hold of her hand, and tried to smile gaily; but she wrenched herself away

from his clasp, with a shade of real anger on her face.

It was the first and only time she had felt angry with him, but her wrath lasted just for an instant.

‘I shall never love any one again,’ she replied hastily, but the last word had slipped out unawares, and she blushed hotly as she remembered the inference she had implied. ‘I mean that no one is likely to appear that I *could* love : but please do not talk about that. Of course I will write ; and you—you will write directly you reach Calcutta, and say if you are *quite* well again. I—that is, papa and mamma and all of us—shall be so very, *very* anxious to receive good tidings.’

‘I will write very often, Blanche ; so often, that you will be tired of my letters ; and if a jealous lover acquires the right of seeing your correspondence, you will beg me to write no more. But yet—even if you

marry—there is no need for you to forget your *brother*, Blanche.'

The emphasised word brought another pained quiver to her lips, and with a gesture of impatience she said, 'I shall *never* marry.'

And she kept her word faithfully. In a short while she parted from George, with no tears in her eyes, and with firmness on her pale mouth ; but her vow of eternal celibacy remained unbroken, and she died within two years after looking her last upon him, with his name upon her lips.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELISABETHEN BRUNNEN.

‘Perjuria ridet amantium Jupiter.’

‘O, many a shaft at random sent
Finds mark the archer little meant;
And many a word at random spoken
May soothe or wound a heart that’s broken.’

THE day succeeding that on which Katie had been exposed to the unpleasant ovation of the lovesick peer was passed by her in a great deal of anxiety and pain.

At an early hour in the morning, after a nearly sleepless night, which she had passed in thoughts that were both perplexing and disagreeable, especially with regard to the conduct that it was wisest of her to pursue towards Lord Castleton, in order to ward off any farther innuendos, if not posi-

tive declarations of his sentiments, she had been suddenly awakened out of a short dream by a touch upon her arm; and opening her eyes, she found the German *bonne's* face in close proximity to her own.

The woman, with a serious countenance, exclaimed, in her own language—in which Katie was, unfortunately, not a proficient—that the child had arisen from his slumbers feverish and fractious. But Katie's faculties, sharpened by anxiety, reached the pith of the roundabout story in a moment; and throwing a white dressing-gown hastily over her, she was soon kneeling by the little one's cot, feeling his brow and pulse, while her own heart beat high with alarm.

He had been so much stronger and better of late, that she had fondly hoped he was fast outgrowing the constant attacks of illness to which he had been subject since his birth. All through the livelong day in the quiet little villa at the Obere Promen-

ade she sat with her darling in her arms, rocking him gently backwards and forwards, trying to soothe him and to take comfort unto herself from the doctor's assurance that the child ailed nothing, but was simply going through the imperative process of teething—that, in fact, the only crisis to be dreaded was convulsions, to which infant flesh was often heir.

Convulsions! It was the most terrible word that could fall on a mother's ears, especially a young and inexperienced one, to whom maternal cares were all-important. Already in imagination she beheld her treasure's little form distorted, and great dews of agony starting on the snow-white face, until she could scarcely restrain herself from that feminine resort for composure and consolation—a fit of hysterics. Nevertheless she bore up bravely, never taking her gaze off the baby that she hugged closely and lovingly to her bosom.

It was late in the evening, and he had fallen asleep quietly in her arms; and fearful of disturbing him, she sat motionless as a statue through the long hours, although her poor limbs were cramped, and a sinking from want of nourishment came over her. Not a morsel of food had passed her lips all the day. In her deep anxiety she felt that an attempt at eating would choke her. At last the child stirred, but uneasily, and opened his blue eyes very wide. But there was an odd dilated look about the pupils, and a twitching of the white eyelids and the tiny mouth, that seemed to work hard and painfully. All of a sudden he clenched his fists tightly, and drew up his knees, while a shiver seemed to run through his frame. A dozen rainbow shadows passed over his face, and his hands and feet grew ice-cold. It was quite enough. Katie, wild with fear, placed him in the nurse's care, and rushed, uncloaked and unbonneted, to the

doctor's house. He was not at home. Scarcely conscious of what she was about, she ran up the steps and through the large glass gallery, that serves as a *café* to the Kursaal, into the *grande salle*. It was considerably past eleven o'clock, and the gambling rooms were partially deserted; but a few persons were loitering about the building, which was slightly darkened, preparatory to closing the establishment for the night. Katie on entering breathlessly accosted one of the servants of the place, begging him to find out at once if Denison was still playing at the tables. In spite of her anxiety, she dared not venture herself in search of her husband.

In a minute or two the man returned with a disappointing negative; and she was turning away sorely vexed and undecided in her movements, when the well-remembered tones of Schmerzundweh fell upon her ears.

Since the day when the actress had insulted her by her invidious remarks, her voice had made an unpleasant never-to-be-forgotten impression upon her memory. Schmerzundweh had overheard the commission which Katie had given the servant, and there was a malicious twinkle of her eye and a curious expression on her features, as, going up close to Denison's wife, she whispered slowly and emphatically,

‘ Le mari de madame s'amuse très bien.
Il se promène au jardin, au clair de la lune;
accompagnée de la grande Anglaise.’

Katie waited for no farther information. She flew like the wind down the terrace and along the flower-planted walks, seeing no one, and feeling her heart very sick and weary. On and on she went, until the Elisabethen Brunnen was reached. Then she suddenly halted, and crept noiselessly under the sheltering shadow of a huge tree, within a yard or two of those of whom

she was in search. The magnificent moon was at its full, shining down through the vaulted sky, and lighting up everything as clearly as though it had been noon-day; but fortunately Katie's slight figure, as it glided into its hiding-place, escaped notice.

‘*La grande Anglaise*,’ as Schmerzundweh had called her, looked gorgeously beautiful under the moon’s bright rays. A fleecy-white shawl, like a cloud, was wrapped loosely over her superb shoulders, and a Spanish hat with a drooping white feather was held carelessly in her hand. She had taken up a pose that would have driven a fanatico for paintings into frenzy, and which would have caused an ovation in the house if she had stood on the boards. There was poetry and grace and elegance in every curve and bend of her rounded form. She looked as different as light from darkness to the figure, robed in black, of the little

eavesdropper hard by, who, with strained eyes and throbbing heart, watched her rival, and listened eagerly, yet O how dreadfully! for any word that might fall from the lips of the husband who, though undoubtedly faithless, was yet so unutterably dear to her still.

Katie, although innocent as a lamb, and utterly unversed in the sinful ways of the world, possessed yet a certain amount of shrewdness in her character, which enabled her at once to recognise the consoling fact, that in spite of solitude and the unseemly hour, there was at any rate nothing dangerous in the situation. Vere and that *dreadful* woman, as she inwardly called the fair aristocrat, stood a little apart from each other. There was not even so much as a hand - clasp between them. Only voices were murmuring together, and murmuring in such lowly tones, that it was with the utmost difficulty that she caught the words

that fell. But love and jealousy are wont to sharpen the oral organs wonderfully.

The first sentence she heard from Denison's lips was a dagger-thrust indeed, and its sharp point wounded her beyond expression.

'Why *will* you always speak of my wife, Lady Millicent? You know the subject wearies me infinitely. It has been discussed between us before,' he said in languid accents, half yawning, and with a listlessness of manner that fully carried out the honesty of his assertion.

Katie was cut to the heart. Vere, who she fancied cared for her in the depth of his soul, although he was cold and undemonstrative as a rule, was actually weary of her, and confessed the miserable truth to another woman. She would have been a good deal happier if she could have divined that her husband was not quite so faulty as appearances showed him to be. If she could have

had a glimpse into his thoughts, she would have discovered that, although he had been drawn slowly and unconsciously into the meshes laid for him by the skilful Messalina, his capture was far from complete, and that he shrank from his wife's name being on false and foul lips.

'Speak only of yourself,' he continued; and his voice had certainly gained in warmth since he had first met her in Paris some months back. 'Surely you must feel a conviction by this time, that that is the theme that interests me most—that I am never tired of *you*, at any rate.'

'But I am jealous of your wife. I am certain that you care for her with all your heart,' she asserted, with a haughty toss of her imperial head, and a coquettish gesture of pettishness.

'Pshaw!'

Katie sickened with unhappiness at the contempt expressed in that short word.

‘Jealous of my wife! You, Lady Millicent, so beautiful and so admired!’ Denison whispered in his most seductive way; but there was an odd little smile hovering about his thin-cut lips that would have gladdened a pair of tearful eyes hard by, only his head was turned in the opposite direction.

‘Yes, it is I who should be jealous, not you. Am I not only *one* among the tribe of adorers to whom you give an equal share of words and smiles? Do I not feel, even when we are together, that a distance which I am unable to span seems to separate us—that you are like the rare and priceless jewel that I long for, but it is useless for me to covet?’

And as Vere indulged in a fit of eloquence, he warmed under his subject, and was carried away beyond the bounds he had laid down for himself in his intercourse with Lady Millicent.

‘Listen to me now, whilst I tell you

that I have striven hard against the spell of your beauty, that I have sworn to myself over and over again never to reveal to you the feelings in my heart, but it is useless. I love you. You are become everything to me, my idol, my world, my all! Tell me, am I more to you than the rest? do you ever feel that my presence is sufficient for you? that you are content to be alone with me, as you are now? Millicent, my Millicent—may I dare to call you so, as I used in the olden time?

And in his tone there was a curious struggle between pathos and laughter. But Katie only heard the words, and they fell like lead upon her heart; but she did not scream, she only shivered, and wished that she was dead.

The Lady Millicent, in spite of the years she had passed in the world—and, as it has been mentioned before, she was long beyond the limits of *première jeunesse*—felt a

strange thrill pass through her frame as she listened. She was a brainless beauty, and it never entered her head that there was a suppressed mockery in the intonation, and a cynical expression on her companion's mouth, that did not correspond with the high-flown sentiments he had uttered.

It was a very long time since she had heard such words; for though men were ready enough to flirt with her, she was acute enough in perception to know that her impression on hearts had not been very deep-seated of late years, although she still possessed the power to attract a shoal of flatterers wherever she went.

The man who was so tenderly addressing her now was the very person who had the greatest influence over her. She loved him according to *her* ideas of love, for his six feet two inches of symmetry, and for the chiselled features of his undeniably handsome face. But if Providence had

visited him with the smallpox and seamed his countenance, or if a cruel accident had arrived to cripple that lithe and elegant form, she would assuredly have turned away from him in indifference, if not in aversion, and she would utterly have ignored any fragment of nobility that existed in his soul. She was gazing up at him now, as he stood beside her under the moonlight, with a good deal of admiration in her gaze. In the figure and face before her she realised her *beau idéal* of manly beauty completely. There was an *entraînante* flattery in her glance, and Denison was essentially a vain man. The proximity that Katie dreaded was nigh. She saw a stately head with a coronet of golden hair droop nearer to Vere's shoulder; two pair of eyes looked into each other, while the moonbeams softened their expression; hands met, and perhaps Denison might have perjured his marital vows by touching scarlet lips, when 'Vere, Vere! baby is

dying?" broke shrilly on the silent air, and a little dusky heap lay inanimate on the ground, just before the Lady Millicent's dainty feet.

CHAPTER IX

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

‘ Then in life’s goblet freely press
The leaves that give it bitterness,
Nor prize the colour’d waters less ;
For in thy darkness and distress
 New light and strength they give.

And he who has not learn’d to know
How false its sparkling bubbles show ;
How bitter are the drops of woe
With which its brim may overflow,—
 He has not learn’d to live !

DENISON hastily raised the insensible form of his wife off the ground, and held her light weight gently in his arms, until after a little while the cool night air falling upon her face brought her back to consciousness.

Meanwhile, on the principle of *sauve qui peut*, the Lady Millicent, unmindful and

careless of the effects of her own wrong-doings, fled with the speed of an antelope through bosquet and pathway towards her own home. With her habitual regard for self, she was fearful lest another cry from Katie's pallid lips should bring witnesses to the scene, and be the foundation of a *scandale*, a thing which she dreaded above everything else. Once safely ensconced in her own apartment, and aware that not a soul was cognisant of the promenade she had indulged in at so late an hour but those whose policy it would be to keep the fact concealed, she composed her mind and her superb limbs, and fell into the deep and dreamless slumber that only unblemished consciences should know. But in the Book of books we read that 'the wicked flourish like the bay-tree,' whatever retribution may await them in another world than this.

Katie opened her eyes wildly, and stared around her, as though in the expectation of

seeing Satan disguised in angelic form still tempting her husband; but nothing met her gaze save the shadows, black and gaunt-shaped, that lay beneath the toppling trees, the wooden benches that glistened white under the moon's bright rays, and Vere Denison's face, so severe and stern and cold that it seemed to freeze her very soul as she looked upon it.

He never uttered a word, but placing her poor little trembling arm within his, half supported and half forced her steps homeward. Katie felt broken-hearted. This was her first great sorrow, and she was pressing the bitter leaves of 'life's goblet' hard indeed.

But it was early yet for the 'coloured waters' of the nauseous draught to give her 'light and strength.' Denison had been a cruel taskmaster often during his married life; he had hurled a sharp arrow full many a time at her that had reached its aim with

unerring fidelity. He had rebuffed her in both scorn and derision when her feelings had overflowed towards him in tenderest love ; but she forgot all that had gone before in this last crowning blow. With another woman engrossing all his heart, and with another woman's beautiful face filling his imagination and living in his thoughts, she knew that all the happiness of her life must be at an end. The foul fiend Jealousy had entered her soul for the first time, and she was tortured by his attendant fears and doubts. Once upon the threshold of the house, the remembrance of the little child whom she had left so ill rushed full upon her, and drawing herself away from Vere's hold, she ran hastily upstairs, with fear knocking loudly in her bosom. And then she sank upon the floor, exclaiming, 'Thank God! thank God!' for the baby lay on the nurse's lap, his pretty features calm, his blue eyes clear, and a

little smile of welcome to his mother upon his rosy mouth.

Poor Katie snatched him to her, and laughed and wept over him hysterically, as she pressed kiss after kiss upon the face that was so like his father's. Then she turned, and saw Denison watching her movements, with the unpleasant sneer on his upper lip that she never could mark without pain. In another instant she had given the child gently back to the *bonne*, and was kneeling beside her husband's chair, and begging his pardon, as humbly as though *she* had been the offending culprit, for having involuntarily witnessed his rendezvous.

‘Vere, forgive me,’ she pleaded, with tears in her eyes. ‘I never intended to follow you, indeed, *indeed* I did not!’ she tried to explain through her agitation; ‘but baby was taken so ill, and in my fear I scarcely knew what I was doing, and my first thought was naturally to have you with me.’

He ignored her words, and answered mockingly,

‘ Well, if you chose to come prying after me, you did not find your suspicions confirmed to a *very* dreadful extent, did you ?’

She could not help recollecting how near the Lady Millicent’s shining head had been to the shoulder that she had looked upon as her own especial resting - place ; but she only sighed deeply, and never attempted to reproach him.

And yet Katie was no craven, or wanting in proper spirit. Against all the world she would bravely have held her own. With him to whom she had sworn implicit obedience she was meek and gentle as a dove.

‘ Vere, I have had no suspicions ; such an idea as doubting you has never entered my mind. I would as soon have doubted myself, and the depth of my affection for you. I would trust you anywhere, and with anybody ; but, O, do not be angry

with me. I cannot help being a little afraid of that—person. Why should she be jealous of me, unless she loves you, and wishes you to love her? And then, Vere, she is very beautiful, and I am not,' she said sorrowfully, as she stood up and glanced into the mirror opposite at her pale face, and longed for some of the gorgeous loveliness that had stolen Denison's heart away from her.

'Do not be a little fool, Katie,' was his ungracious answer. 'You have seen nothing of the world, or you would not make a mountain out of a molehill. I detest a fuss; and I do not care for the woman. If it will satisfy you, I will not speak to her again.'

Katie started forward, and seized tight hold of his hand. The poor pale face of a moment back was sparkling with brightness as she spoke to him, and her eyes danced with gladness and hopefulness.

'You won't! O, Vere, how good of you

to give in to my fancies ! I will never, *never* doubt you again !' and she threw her soft arms round his neck, and pressed a long kiss on his fair curls. 'Do you know that I was under a tree a long, long time, and heard nearly all you said; and I began to feel so wicked, just as if I could have plunged a knife into her white neck, and have laughed if she had died ! But all the while, in spite of all I suffered, I could not have hurt you, Vere—no, not for the world ! Will you really promise not to speak to her again ?'

'On my honour.'

'Dear darling Vere ! if you only knew how happy you have made me ! I believe I should die if you ceased to care for me; for I love you with *all* my heart !' and the expression of her features confirmed her assertion beyond a doubt.

Denison looked at her amiably, as he stroked her hair; then, with a complacent

smile, he settled himself comfortably into an easy-chair for a quiet cigar before bed. Through the clouds of white smoke he saw Lady Millicent's gray-blue eyes, looking at him with the flattering glance they had worn under the moonlight; but there was very little real sentiment in his composition, and in her absence the glamour of her gaze was dispelled. His promise to his wife had been a very safe one, for Lady Millicent was leaving Homburg by an early train on the morrow, and that meeting by the Elisabethen Brunnen had been arranged for the purpose of bidding 'farewell' for a while. Now that a few fair words and an easy promise had dispersed all fears of anarchy in his home, he felt rather pleased than otherwise that Katie's sudden appearance on the trysting-spot had curtailed the harrowing adieu which he knew her *exigéante* ladyship would have expected. To a certain extent the slave of fashion, he had crouched

for a while at the feet of fashion's queen; but for the 'woman' he cared no more than he did for the worthless remnant of his cigar that he flung carelessly aside.

CHAPTER X.

LA FAIM CHASSE LE LOUP HORS DU BOIS.

When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat,
Yet fool'd with hope, men favour the deceit,
Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay :
To-morrow's falser than the former day,
Lies worse ; and while it says, " We shall be blest
With some new joys," cuts off what we possess'd !

DRYDEN.

DENISON began to chafe impatiently after Lady Milicent's departure. Othello's occupation was, in a manner, gone, when she was no longer in Homburg to bid him do her will in all the thousand and one *petits soins* that women love to exact from each slave who salaams obsequiously before them, and finding time lay wondrously heavy on his hands, he set to work with redoubled vigour at the tables. Every one of the

complicated systems which he had spent hours of the day and night in studying had, on trial, sautéed him after a little while, although at first it had appeared to succeed. But the luck that seems to attend the bank was too strong to be overturned. If he followed the red, it treacherously evaded him; if he went in for series, the game became intermittent. At length continued ill-luck made him cowardly and nervous, and he lost the pluck without which no gamester ever won at rouge-et-noir. He began to fear pushing the little good fortune that fell to his share, and often sat idle through a deal that might perchance have retrieved his losses to a considerable extent.

Rouleau on rouleau of gold was offered up by him, but all in vain; the insatiate goddess refused to be propitiated, and after hours passed in 'punting,' to use the word that is most in vogue at gambling places, he would rise from his seat with the sick

and desperately weary sensation that every *jouer* knows so well. Then finding trente et quarante an *ignis fatuus* altogether, he rushed to roulette. Roulette has far greater fascination than rouge-et-noir, and to a thorough gambler it is by far the most dangerous game of the two.

The very idea that a successful raid on one of the numbers is so liberally paid is in itself sufficient to induce excitement and assiduity to the fickle wheel. The fact that so many chances are against the stake being won appears never to enter the whirling brain of a constant devotee at the game. Denison flung himself heart and soul into the task of hitting upon the right numbers, but before a week was over he found himself completely cleared out. Nothing but sheer want of funds could have driven him away *nolens volens* from what had become a master-passion in his soul. One night, after the greatest run of ill-luck he had ever

had, he returned home with only sufficient coin in his pocket to liquidate domestic bills and to pay their way to Spa ; and telling his wife the true condition of the exchequer, he bade her pack up without delay. Far into the night Katie willingly worked to carry out her husband's desire of quitting Homburg on the following day ; and all the while, she never intruded on her privilege of reading him a lecture on the very deplorable state to which his folly and imprudence had reduced their finances. There was nothing of Mrs. Caudle's nature about her, and neither did she bear out the temper of her well-known namesake ; but even if she had been shrewish of tongue, Denison would have proved an able Petruchio to tame any will that dared to war against his own. But Katie herself was far from loth to leave a place in which she had had much less happiness than sorrow. Of late she had led even a more secluded existence than

before, on the plea of indisposition, but in reality to evade more meetings than necessity entailed with Lord Castleton, whose eyes were eloquent when his lips were closed, and who seldom left a chance neglected of being in her society.

It was a lovely morning in the month of September when Denison, together with his Lares and Penates, were whirled along through the most beautiful and most cultivated portion of Belgium. It had been Vere's wish to send his wife and child back to England, and he had with his usual reserve concealed his intention from Katie, but taken a circuitous route to Spa from Germany via Brussels.

But at Brussels Katie had ventured for once to rebel completely against the arrangement, and her countenance had worn so woebegone and wan a look at the prospect of the separation, that Denison had relented, though with a very bad grace.

He had set his mind on enjoying the freedom of bachelorism at Spa, and it riled him considerably to be obliged to give in to his wife's solicitation. But she did not grieve at the annoyance in his manner and aspect. He was everything in the world to her, even when he was ill-tempered; so with the inexpressible consolation of knowing that they were not to part she resigned herself quite cheerfully to an atmosphere of storms, and determined by extra regard for all the little comforts that he dearly loved to win back the smiles that made her sunshine.

They travelled past the small white *maisonettes* that stand in groups upon the picturesque and verdant banks of the purple Meuse, the 'pocket edition of the enchanting Rhine,' as Bradshaw justly terms it, and past the magnificent woody heights and delicious little nooks and dells that abound in the vicinity of Chaudefontaine;

then through the fairy-like scenery that lies in close contiguity to Spa. The golden sunbeams, bereft by the late season of the year of too fervid a power, were yet brilliant enough to gild into deepest yellow the crests of the trees that stood arrayed in all their pride in varied hues of splendid red and brown.

They danced merrily too on the eddying ripples of the narrow and limpid streamlets that like manifold silvery threads intersected the country on either side; here and there, almost within hand-clutch of the travellers, clusters of vivid scarlet berries, poisonous but gorgeous in colour, flouted out from amidst masses of wild fern, feathery and nodding, and the rich dark leaves of shiny laurustinus, while the lambent air savoured far more of summer time than of the 'death of the year.' Katie felt lighter-hearted than she had done for many a weary month, and her face wore the sparkling *espièglerie* of her maiden days, as she gazed

out into the soft mellow light that tinted tree to turf, or listened to the prattle of her child.

He had almost arrived at the mature age of twelve months, and he had all the quaint little ways that very young children often possess in common with monkeys, and he was a perfect picture of beauty; fashioned after one of Rubens' cherubims, with great round rings of flossy gold adorning his head, and the brightest bluest eyes that ever were seen. But of all his admirers, his mother was naturally the most ardent. No artistic pose, suggested by the most poetical of imaginations, could have obtained a quarter of the intense admiration that Katie lavished on the small scion of the Denisons, squatted oriental fashion upon his haunches on the cushions beside her, with the summit of a tiny dimpled thumb employed suctorially in a most energetic manner. Every now and then, however,

just the shadow of a shade rapidly traversed her brow as she watched, earnestly but covertly, the expression of Denison's features, as he conversed in an excited but *sotto-voce* tone with Lord Castleton and some other sporting men who had accompanied them from Homburg, about the coming race, which was to set him up again in finances.

Her very soul sickened at the repetition of the stably jargon, interspersed by words that were more forcible than refined, that met her ears from time to time, and her spirit sank within her as she marked the hot flush that burnt on her husband's usually pale face, and the glitter in his look as he discussed the chances in his favour, and the reverse. Katie hated, with as strong a hatred as her gentle feminine nature was capable of nourishing, the individuals whose society tended to foster and incite the passion of gambling in him who was, alas, only too prone to the sin. It

was not of herself that she thought; she was neither grasping nor selfish, and a crust of bread, eaten in peace and happiness, would have been a far more acceptable meal to her than luxuries untold, with anxiety gnawing at her continually; but she was fearful for her child's future, of the fate that must inevitably attend the offspring of a confirmed gamester. She longed as she sat there, tongue-tied and powerless, to find herself alone with Vere, with the pernicious companionship that she both loathed and dreaded removed many a mile away.

She would willingly have gone down on her knees, and besought Denison to pluck out while there was yet time the besetting passion that was dragging them quickly to ruin. She loved him as only a good and true wife can love, and it broke her heart to see the idol whom she had raised so high fall lower and lower from the pedestal

of honour and rectitude which her mind recognised as the sole and right standard.

She dared scarcely indulge in even a hope that things would ameliorate. She tried to persuade herself that 'every cloud has a silver lining,' and that it was a happy idea that 'it was always the darkest the hour before day.'

She was grappling with dark fancies always, and trusting that light would break in at last, but the good time seemed to be very long in coming. It discouraged her to know that there was no one in the world who had any influence over her husband, and *her* power over him was utterly futile to work the end she wished to arrive at. At her heart there was a sorrowful conviction, that even if the guerdon of privacy had been granted her, that her prayers would probably be rejected, if not rebuked as childish folly, and received by bitter jeering that stung her to the quick. And

in truth, it would have been a useless task to have tried to draw Denison away just at this particular time from the pursuit which had brought him within an ace of penury.

During his long stay at Homburg he had been forced to resort to all manner of expedients for 'raising the wind,' and enormous sums were requisite for the high games he played.

He had succeeded in finding the wherewithal, but only at immense interest, amongst the Frankfort Jews; the rapacious sharks that fatten on their trade, and who cling assiduously to any man whose maiden stakes are made in crisp bank-notes. He had completely wrung his own people in England dry, and his demand for farther remittances from his father had been finally a dead letter. Denison Père, one of the wealthiest commoners in the north, was willing enough to expend money on all that appertained to show and ostentation,

but the gambling debts of a thriftless son were far too disgraceful to be paid in his estimation.

Moreover, Vere was in the family bad books, since he had disappointed their expectations in having allied himself to a ‘mere nobody,’ as they stigmatised Katie. He was heir to the extensive domain of Linden Hollows, and with his birth and pretensions he might have wedded with the noblest of the land. Katie’s recommendations of beauty and virtue, and being the best little wife in the world, had not raised her a whit in their estimation. Good qualities were but little in comparison to blue blood; and nothing could commensurate for the muddy mixture with a patrician and plebeian.

But in spite of all his pecuniary troubles, with the extreme excitability and sanguine temperament that is invariably to be found in the breast of a true gambler

Denison had again taken heart, and had determined that the Spa course should turn out the very El Dorado that he was in search of. To his credit be it said, that he had vowed internally to eschew all future coquetting with capricious and cruel Fortune in the event of his hopes being realised this once.

He had brought his horse Magenta with him—an animal that had behaved creditably on several occasions, and had won his owner 'hatfuls' of money. By a clever management he and his clique had got the horse into the race at the nice weight of eleven stone five; and the wily fraternity had booked the race as a great a moral as was ever known on the turf. They had backed him to win them an enormous sum, and they spared no pains to get more on.

It was on the evening preceding the grand event that several of the sporting community dined together at one of the

principal hotels in the town and after the ordinary amount of wine-cups and hilarious jokes attendant on orgies of the kind, the conversation turned upon the engrossing topic.

‘I have no hesitation in taking three hundred to one hundred about Magenta,’ Lord Castleton said quietly and rather unconcernedly. There were no signs of any unusual excitement in his manner, for he was a remarkably temperate man, and had made it a golden rule in life to avoid all undue court of the Bromian god.

The odds he had laid were, however, child’s play to him. Money was a thing *ad infinitum*, and he was lavish to a fault; as Schmerzundweh, besides several others, could have proved. Even while he was speaking, his eyes were watching the nervous shaking of Denison’s delicate white hand as it conveyed bumper after bumper of frothy Moët to his pale lips; and Claude’s

expression was full of contempt and dislike as he gazed.

‘I always thought him a thorough-paced *mauvais sujet*, but I never imagined he would go utterly to the bad so soon,’ he growled inwardly. ‘Gambler, drunkard, cold-blooded hypocrite! what a husband for poor dear little Katie! And yet how she loves him! Women are strange creatures. I thoroughly believe in the old saying,

“A woman, a dog, and a walnut-tree,
The more you beat them the better they be!”

Yet such an angel as Katie ought to keep any man straight.’

And as he thought of her a soft tender light replaced the scorn in his eyes, and Claude swallowed down a deep sigh, and then he blushed like a great girl, lest any one should deem him guilty of so *canaille* a quality as real feeling of any sort.

‘Put it down twice, if you like,’ a man named Darford vociferated with a vehem-

ence which was partly due to bacchanalian worship.

He was quite of the rough-and-ready Nimrod type, with his whole heart and soul in the saddle and field. He was going to ride his own mare, Lady Douglas, and from her previous form in the Grand Military at Rugby and other steeplechases, he was convinced that she was certain to be in at the finish, if not A1.

‘If five fifties are of any use to you, Darford, I shall be very happy to lay,’ said a small and effeminate voice from the far end of the festive board.

The sound emanated from the narrow chest of a diminutive and ladylike youth who rejoiced in the patronymic of Prettyman, and who, having had the misfortune of being plucked for his ‘little go,’ had been vainly trying for some weeks whether his Cambridge mathematics could not teach him an infallible system for breaking the bank.

It was far into the night before the convivial party separated, after having made and booked bets of various kinds; and it was quite in the gray light of struggling day, with a welcome breeze fanning his heated temples, that Denison walked home-wards with a gait that was not remarkable for its steadiness, but yet with a brain sufficiently clear from the fumes of wine to calculate to a nicety the sum of money of which he was certain to be the winner on the eventful day.

CHAPTER XI.

PRESENTIMENTS.

‘ Catch then, O, catch the transient hour,
Improve each moment as it flies,—
Life’s a short summer, man’s a flower;
He dies ! alas, how soon he dies !’

‘ Not so sick, my lord,
As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies,
That keep her from rest.’

IT was barely eleven A.M. when the entire population of Spa appeared to be *en route* to the Hippodrome de Saart, although, in point of fact, the large bills placarded on all sides had announced that the first race would not be run until two o’clock. The important event had raised up quite an agitation amongst the visitors of the town as well as in the honest Spadois themselves,

and it had absorbed all interest, even to the detriment of the fascinating rouge-et-noir and roulette, both of which were placed for a while completely *in statu quo*.

The huge gambling-saloons looked very desolate and dreary divested of the ordinary crowd of human beings buzzing round the tables ; and the knights of the order of the 'Golden Fleece,' with rueful and elongated visages, and useless croups in hand, sat and stared supinely at each other across the empty green baize.

Not so much as a shabby-looking dingy professor of the game, or an unwary negotiant from the neighbouring towns of Liège or Verviers, were visible ; but the two-legged spiders were content to wait patiently, fully assured that the night would bring the foolish flies fluttering back into the enticing meshes laid out so carefully for their capture, and that the heaviest stakes won on the racecourse that day would, before the

next one dawned, be safely deposited in the strong *caisse* of the Kursaal Bank.

But amidst the women's bright faces, sparkling and flashing in the animated scene, that of Denison's wife was missing. Katie so utterly abhorred the whole thing, that, on pretext of sudden indisposition, she had remained quietly within doors, never so much as even glancing from her windows upon the heaving panorama of rainbow hues, that was doing high jubilee in the square that forms the frontage of the celebrated Pouhon Spring dedicated to the memory of Pierre le Grand, and which on all holiday occasions serves as a general rendezvous for the inhabitants and residents of the place. On this as on other gala days there was a heterogeneous mixture of fair devotees to fashion, peasants in dirty blue blouses, tiny phaetons with a single Rosinante or a pair of diminutive Ardenne ponies, dogs of all sorts, and sellers of the

programme des courses announcing their calling in vociferous accents.

Deaf to the noise outside, and indifferent to the liveliness of the scene, Katie sat solitary and self-absorbed. Yet she loved her husband far too dearly not to feel a deep interest in all that concerned him, although racing and all else that appertained to gambling had inspired a feeling of strong detestation in her breast. She wished him success from the inmost depths of her heart, yet she possessed sufficient wisdom to be aware that loss on some occasions is often-times the greatest gain in the end.

As for herself, poverty accompanied by peace in any out-of-the-way nook on the earth would have been a terrestrial paradise in comparison with the feverish existence of the latter months, with the inconvenience of fluctuating finances, and with her mind tortured by doubts and jealousies. All these had engendered a miserable restlessness and

a painful anxiety that at times had seemed almost unbearable to her. Nevertheless she could not help, with the tender weakness of a woman, desiring in her heart for Denison all that he desired for himself. Had it been a case of *prendre la lune avec les dents*, Katie could not have denied him her sympathy, although the absurdity of the fancy might have been perfectly evident to her eyes.

And while the whole of little Spa was out holiday-making, she sat alone, with her heart full of her husband, and her soul yearning towards him doubly as it were ; for his mood had been several degrees softer towards her on this day before he started for the racecourse than she had remembered it for a much longer time than it would have been a pleasant task for her to try and calculate. Very few smiles or loving words had been allotted her ; indeed she could almost have counted them. But perhaps it was the very rarity of Vere's kindness

that made her prize each trivial proof of it, and hug its memory very close. All the preceding night, whilst he was carousing at the sporting feast, she had lain in her bed wakeful, and with an unwonted depression weighing down her spirits that she could not shake off. Now and then, when exhausted nature had brought short snatches of sleep, terrifying visions of death had visited her, and she had awakened trembling, and with her pulsation increased two-fold, to find happily that they were only visions after all.

The effects of her painful dreams and vigil were evident enough in her heavy eyelids and unusual quietude of manner, and Denison, in spite of his preoccupation and self-absorption, could not fail to perceive that the indisposition she confessed to feeling was infinitely more mental than physical. Strangely enough, he refrained from launching into his habitual satire at

her expense—a satire in fear of evoking which Katie, once so unreserved and demonstrative, had grown to be many a time wonderfully reticent and quiet, smothering back into herself any ebullitions of affection that might excite irony or laughter. Denison, instead of vexing or wounding her, had this day displayed a gentleness that sat curiously upon him; he even vouchsafed to evince an interest in her health, which was a very rare treat for Katie. It was no marvel, then, that her poor little heart began to flutter and to throb as much at his words as though she had been in the full swing of the golden *lune de miel*, instead of a wife over whom several seasons had rolled.

Her husband had inured her to receiving many more rebuffs than kisses; but though such treatment might have been wofully dangerous to pursue with some women, he had not succeeded in hardening

Katie. She shrank from the pain he inflicted with the same keen intensity that she had always experienced in the very beginning of her married career. No amount of harshness or injustice on his part seemed able to render her callous or cold, and a voluntary kiss from his lips brought just as bright a light to her eyes, and just as vivid a colour flickering on her cheeks now, as when he had come 'a-wooing' to the Larches.

On this morning, after studying her pale features for a while, Vere had stooped and kissed her—actually kissed her with both warmth and reality—and that kiss had seemed to infuse new life full of joy and hope into her veins. On the spur of the moment, inebriated as it were with surprised happiness, she entirely forgot her awe of her husband—for she *was* afraid of him, and to a very great extent, even though it might have been unconsciously to herself

—and flinging her arms round his neck, she drew him tightly to her, while a terrible thought that had been haunting her pillow all the night long flashed vividly across her brain.

What if she were to lose him? The very notion seemed to curdle her blood with horror and anguish. He was her husband, her all, and—attraction perhaps more potent and magical still to a young and impassioned temperament—he was her very *first* love!

It was true that she could not conjure up many proofs on his part that she was dear to him. There were no extraordinary acts of goodness either towards her that could make him live in her memory as a pattern helpmate. He had, in fact, been very chary of spoiling her with too much petting; but with all his faults, she felt that she could not have worshipped him more if he had been the most perfect of men.

After she had yielded to her loving im-

pulse, she let her arms fall down, alarmed at her own temerity ; and she glanced upwards, dreading to see a frown of vexation at her action upon the broad white forehead of her liege lord. But in lieu of a furrow of annoyance, a pleasant smile hovered upon his mouth, and a pair of aristocratic hands, soignéed to perfection, stroked down her auburn hair caressingly, in a manner that was the very antipodes of cold.

‘Après cela la déluge.’ A feeling of superstition almost half crept over her ; a dread that something unusual *must* happen after so strange and sudden a change.

‘Catch then, O, catch the transient hour,
Improve each moment as it flies,’

was a sensible suggestion of the wise Johnson, and one which most mortals ‘in love’ are apt to take advantage of.

Katie, with that unexpected smile on Denison’s face, took courage at once ; and

sliding her hand through his arm, she clung to him passionately.

‘Vere, take care of yourself,’ she implored of him, with a great falter in her voice, as she tried with all her might to drive back to their burning source the tears that rushed unbidden to her eyes, and gulped down a sob, knowing that weeping was one of his pet aversions. ‘You always ride so recklessly, you know. And O, I *cannot* help it !’

And she broke into the very shower she had wished so earnestly to avert.

‘Do not be angry at my crying, Vere; I feel so nervous to-day,’ she said, pitifully enough. ‘Suppose anything dreadful was to happen! Supposing if you were—*killed!*’

The last word fell from her white lips in a slow and solemn whisper that even startled her auditor. Then she looked up at him with wild distended eyes, as if she

were trying to realise the horror her imagination had painted; and yet all the time her face wore a curious deprecatory expression upon it, just as if she was mutely begging of him not to visit her anxiety and nervousness with anger.

Suddenly she turned away from him, and crouching down at the end of the sofa, she tried to bring her agitated feelings within control as far as it was possible for her to do. But this day in September was fated to be a marked one in the calendar of her existence.

Instead of chiding her or exhibiting signs of impatience or petulance, Denison went towards her and lifted her gently up, holding her to him affectionately for a moment; and the poor little head fell wearily down upon his breast, and her hands, cold as marble, caught hold of his tightly and gratefully, essaying to thank him by their eloquent pressure when words were failing

her completely. He could feel her heart beating very quickly against his own, although she made gigantic efforts to calm it.

For once in his life—for Denison was certainly of a hard and metallic nature—he felt really touched as he looked down upon the shining head, whose long auburn tresses bestrewed his chest, and marked the unfeigned depths of devotion and grief that made his wife's bosom heave so hard against his own. In that moment the visions of full many an angry word that had fallen from him, the memory of biting sarcasms and of scores of unjust actions committed against one who loved him thus, rose up reproachfully before his mind's eye.

‘Why,’ he questioned himself, ‘had he so often forgotten the vows made at the altar on a bright summer's morning, that was not brighter or more beautiful than the wife that Heaven had given him?’ The very words of the marriage ceremony seemed

to be shouted into his ear by the remorseful voice of conscience: 'To have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.'

Not a tithe of his solemn promise had he kept. Katie had been nothing to him but a lovely plaything at the first—an object of indifference, and sometimes even of inconvenience, at the last. In a man of his education and refinement the foul language and cowardly blows inflicted by a boor on the miserable creature to whom he was mated would have excited the keenest disgust and repugnance; for practical ill-treatment to a woman was too low and dastardly a thing for men of his type to comprehend. Education and the refinement that it brings with it would have made him shrink with the utmost horror at the bare notion of forgetting for a moment that a woman *was*

a woman, weak, helpless, and utterly unable physically to hold her own against violence or brutality. Denison had therefore abstained throughout his married life from even a semblance of roughness to Katie; but he knew quite well that he *had* hurt her often—stabbed her to the very soul by cruel coldness and unkind words.

As he watched her, so loving and so gentle, clinging to him in her utter abandonment of sorrow, he forgot for a while himself in her to whom he had hitherto portioned out such scanty affection or consideration, and he determined that the ‘future’ should make up for the past, to the poor little heart that was trembling with fear lest danger should come to assail him.

‘When the devil got ill, the devil a saint would be;
But when the devil got well, the devil a saint was he,’
is a very old adage exemplified frequently in the world.

Denison’s feelings were undoubtedly

is weak, and to a great extent, and vows of amendment were registered by him in earnestness and truth; but he was not often induced to yield to softness for very long: he was too great a worldling at the core to possess much depth of affection, or to be sincere in good purpose. Nevertheless his tones were unusually gentle and tender as he spoke.

"Do not cry, Katie, there's a good child. You are not well, and hopped, and full of little fancies. Why should any harm happen to me? Magenta is safe to win, as sure as I am standing here; and a few hours hence you will be congratulating me heartily on having got a passport from hell to heaven—for want of funds is hell, and it will be heaven to feel ourselves all square again. Now cheer up, there's a darling, and pray that all may go well to-day; and, Katie," he added, taking her small pale face in both hands, and looking tenderly into her

eyes, 'I *swear* to you, that if Magenta *does* win, we will leave this accursed part of the globe at once and for ever. No more gambling for me. I feel as if the very sight of that green cloth sickens me; and I have grown too chicken-hearted to care to risk a coin upon it. We will go and settle down quietly, like a regular Darby and Joan, in some snug quarter of old England, in "the world forgetting, by the world forgotten," sort of fashion, you know; and we'll give ourselves up to the domestic and virtuous occupation of training that young ruffian "in the way he should go."

And he pointed to the child, who, seated on the floor surrounded by perfect pyramids of toys, looked up and smiled gleefully, just as though he had properly understood, and thoroughly appreciated, his parent's benevolent intentions towards him. Had the source of his mirth been analysed, it would have been found to proceed from the fact

of having triumphantly succeeded in fracturing into atoms the head of a wooden Zouave, on the rupture of whose pericranium he had been busily and silently employed for a very long while, thus early developing the bump of destruction that so many human beings possess to an inordinate degree.

‘Let me kiss my son and heir before I go,’ laughed Denison, putting on pompous accents. ‘Heir to his father’s beauty and his gambling debts, eh, Katie? I wonder when he will begin to show proclivities for rouge-et-noir!’

Katie shuddered; but she answered nothing, although her lips seemed to move slightly. Perhaps she was sending up a little prayer that the child might be shielded from all evil as she took him, and held him up to receive the paternal salutation, that was a rare privilege indeed.

Denison patted the round rosy cheeks, and drew his fingers admiringly through

the golden rings that covered the baby head, and then, with a sudden ebullition of fatherly pride, he placed the boy on his shoulders and walked to the opposite mirror, to inspect his offspring more minutely than he had ever done before; whilst the little one, enchanted at the novelty of his elevated position, crowed and chuckled with infantine delight; and Katie stood and looked on, happy to see her child in her husband's arms. Yet no smile was on her lip, and her heart was very heavy.

She bade Denison give the boy his blessing, and then she put him down within his barricade of playthings, and with a strange thrill of pain she began unconsciously to examine her husband's features, with the serious sorrowful gaze of a person studying beloved lineaments on the eve of a long separation.

‘Promise me, Vere,’ she pleaded, ‘that if all *does* go well, we shall leave for Eng-

land at once; that winning the race will not induce you to be venturesome again; that you *will* give up pursuits that only make you unhappy and unsettled. O, swear that we shall leave this, and keep your word.'

She begged this with clasped hands and very tearful eyes.

'I promise, Katie, that within a week we shall be standing on English soil—I do indeed. And if this race retrieves my losses, I will never approach those tables again; so help me Heaven!' he replied, with much more fervour and sincerity than his shallow tones usually had.

Katie never dreamt of doubting him.

'Thank God!' was all she murmured; and already hope seemed to revive in her breast that the clouds had passed away, and that nothing but sunshine was at hand.

'And now, Katie, good-bye.' And he stooped and kissed her fondly.

She flung her arms around him, and held him with wonderful strength close to her, and she felt as though she could never let him go again.

‘Good-bye, Vere,’ she said at last. Her voice was trembling, and she could scarcely see him for the blinding tears, as she leant out of the window and watched his tall figure hurrying across the square.

‘God guard you from harm, my darling, my dear, dear love!’ she kept on repeating to herself when he had vanished out of sight. Then she flung herself down on the couch, feeling that it was futile to seek any occupation for her mind, or work for her fingers, while her nerves were so unhinged, and her breath came fast and flurried.

The little one had quietly fallen off to sleep on the carpet among the *débris* of maimed soldiers and mangled cattle, and Katie dropped into a semi-unconscious state of pleasant dreaming, in which she pictured

the quiet and picturesque English home, in which her husband would be all her own, and where no wicked fairies, with gleaming hair and grandly-arched brows over cerulean eyes and vermillion lips, would venture to steal away the priceless treasure of his love.

The bright daylight waned lower and lower, and the dark shadows of night came creeping, creeping, slowly but surely into the room, but Katie never stirred.

CHAPTER XII.

HIPPODROME DE SAART.

‘L’homme propose et Dieu dispose.’

‘Ay, but to die, and go we know not where !
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot.
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod ; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling regions of thick-ribb’d ice,
To be imprison’d in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world.’

THE Hippodrome de Saart is placed somewhere within the radius of a couple of miles from the little town of Spa.

Although the road leading up to it is rough and impracticable to a certain extent, the course itself for *viewing* a race is per-

haps not to be surpassed even in old England.

The going is extremely good; and although thickly covered with heather, the springy nature of the soil, both in summer and winter time, would have delighted the heart of old John Scott.

Hugh Darford, of Knowsley Lodge, and Master of the Darlington Hunt, was up at the Hippodrome betimes, and he regarded it with complacency, as being the very thing to suit to a T the speedy Lady Douglas. Already in imagination the Castleton money lay snugly and pleasantly in his pocket.

Denison, whose parting with Katie had made somewhat of a laggard, reached his destination only in time to walk over the course with his particular clique; but on a hasty survey they found it moderately satisfactory on the whole, although heavier going would in all probability have suited 'heir book a good deal better.

The places that they distrusted most were some double posts and rails, which to their keen judgment in such matters boded evil to the horse that might hit them hard.

However, on returning to the ring, they backed Magenta for all they could get on, making him favourite at two to one, taken freely. Three to one was booked to money about Lady Douglas, and five to one on Bantam.

Of the others, Worcester alone was supported. The saddling-bell rang out loudly, and the jockeys, divested of their light over-coats, were ready for the fray.

The first to canter past was Lady Douglas, and she certainly in nowise belied the lavish praises of her owner, as with her easy beautiful stride she galloped past the stand, with several voices in the excited crowd shouting that there was 'nothing like blood, after all.'

Next came little Bantam, the pride of

ould Ireland, followed, as a matter of course, by a motley and somewhat grotesque troop of a dozen noisy and enthusiastic natives, brandishing the inevitable shillalahs.

Bantam was a magnificent little chestnut with a coat of gold, the best of shoulders, and fine weight-carrying quarters. In fact, he would have been a perfect picture, had it not been for his twisted fetlock-joints, which, although they did not act against him, were yet terrible eyesores to real connoisseurs in horseflesh.

He had been trained at Spa by a celebrated sporting son of Mars, and he carried all the money and hopes of the good Spadois, and he was ridden by James Tye, one of the best of English jockeys.

Worcester was a good-looking hunter, but plough and more fencing would have suited him infinitely better. Still there was no doubt but that he was fit and well, and certain to stand up; for a finer fencer never

went over Leicestershire. His rider was a man of the name of Liddell, an ex-captain of the line.

Slasher, Spitfire, and Saddle followed in succession; but for what purpose they figured on the field was somewhat enigmatical, as, unless all the others came to grief, they had no possible chance.

Last out of the saddling enclosure, just as if it were done for luck's sake, came the favourite; and as he walked down the course, with his trainer by his side, none could have helped hoping that he might come off victor. He was a dark-brown, about fifteen hands three inches, with a head and eye betokening the best of tempers combined with the highest courage. His sloping shoulders and deep girth looked like both staying and going; and glancing behind the saddle, the jumping power could not have been doubted.

With his intelligent head stretched out, as he quietly champed his bit, he looked

just the animal to put unlimited faith in, to carry bravely either to the fore or to the charge.

His owner and trainer considered the race a certainty for him, *bar accidents*. Duty had certainly been done him; for the polish on his coat would have been a credit to Danesbury, and the muscle stood out all over him; and Denison, as with hands well down, he galloped past and over the hurdles, looked 'the right man in the right place.'

They got off from the starting-point at the first attempt, and Darford, taking advantage of his light weight, went to the front, and made the pace hot, with the remainder following in a cluster on his heels.

The first three fences were safely negotiated; but approaching the double post and rails, Slasher rushed at them, and taking off too soon, came down heavily.

He righted himself quickly, but his chance, if he ever had had any, was entirely destroyed. The rest got over safely, and Darford taking a pull at his mare, Worcester went on with the lead, the others lying well up.

All were now sailing gloriously downhill, and the excitement grew each moment more and more intense. Lord Castleton, between his teeth and with a twinge of conscience, could not control a murmur that Denison's neck might be jeopardised, and Katie, the sweetest and most lovable woman on earth, be free to be wooed and won. The very idea made his brain giddy and the horses swim before his vision in a shapeless mass. But the gods evidently frowned on his impious desire; for Magenta, with Worcester by his side, cleared the brook like a bird, closely followed by Bantam and Lady Douglas. Spitfire got over with a splash; but Saddle, jumping right

into the middle of the water, treated her rider to an impromptu bath.

The rest were now ascending the hill, the pace being still uncommonly good, and the lot keeping well together. Nearing the Irish bank, Bantam raced for the lead, and cleared it at two lengths in front of the favourite, amidst the vociferous cheers of all the Hibernian division. Worcester and Lady Douglas were with them, and both went strong and well.

At the post and rails the four took very close order, and raced for the fence that lay before the brook. *It was a nasty drop, and if not well cleared, was certain to harm.*

Magenta, who had been pulling hard, overpowered Denison, and rushing at the fence, struck the top binder, and turned completely over his rider, who lay in a doubled-up heap beneath him!

From this point the race was a match.

between Bantam and Lady Douglas; and so well both went, that it looked a neck-to-neck race. The riders eyed one another, and knew that the finish would be a very near thing. Half a mile from home, Tye, mindful of the severe hill to end with, took a steadier, and the mare was again slightly in the front.

At the hurdles at the foot of the hill the pair closed, and ran home locked together. But in the few last strides, Tye called on the little chestnut for a final effort, and answering most gamely, he landed the purple and yellow hoops by a neck, Worcester coming in a bad third.

Meanwhile Castleton, with several others, had galloped hastily down to the spot where Denison lay.

His neck was broken.

Claude bent down, and looked hard at the handsome face, all white and rigid al-

ready, and he felt a deadly sickness come over him, as he remembered his evil wish of a short time back. The desire of winning Katie faded into mere nothingness beside the thought of what her anguish would be when that miserable crushed form met her eyes. And Claude's hands were cold and trembling as he lifted up the body with the aid of others, as gently and tenderly as though the life-blood still coursed in its veins and its pulses were not stilled for ever.

They placed their burden in a carriage, and at a funereal pace took it back to the house where Katie, waiting patiently for her husband's return, sat rapt in blissful visions of a future that would fully atone in its pure and perfect happiness for all the pain and anxiety she had suffered in the short period of her married life.

CHAPTER XIII.

CUT DOWN AS GRASS.

‘Leaves have their time to fall,
And flowers to wither by the north wind’s breath,
And stars to set ; but all—
Thou hast all seasons for thine own, O Death !’

THE shadows had crept closely in and in, and the sombre gloom of an autumnal evening had darkened the room, whilst a solitary candle placed in a distant corner served by its pale and flickering light but to raise up weird fantastic shapes on the opposite wall, and to render the darkness still more visible, as Katie sat, deep in thought, with the child lying fast asleep on the carpet near her feet. The sound of his low and even breathing was all that broke the complete stillness around, until of a sudden the great house

door swung slowly back on its rusty hinges with a harsh and grating noise, and heavy footsteps reëchoed on the wooden staircase.

Exclaiming joyously, ‘It *is* Vere at last!’ Katie with one bound cleared the room, and stood upon the threshold, with beaming eyes, and hands outstretched in eager welcome.

Yes! it *was* Vere.

She stood as white and as rigid as a marble statue, as still and motionless as though she had suddenly become rooted to the ground, with the glad laugh on her lips hushed into an awful silence, and with a terrible despair filling her eyes, as, slowly passing her, they bore their burden into the room, and placed *it* reverentially upon the very couch on which she had lain all that long afternoon, weaving such fairy tissues of golden hope and bliss, dreaming such pleasant dreams!

Not a word fell from her mouth, and

she never stirred from the spot where she stood; but all the while she vigilantly watched their movements, and followed them with great piteous looks, whilst her two little hands clenched and twisted fiercely together.

Then knowing that all human assistance was utterly hopeless, they turned to leave the room. And springing past them, with the glance of a wild animal in torture, she crouched down low on the ground, beside what they had brought back to her, beside all that was left of *him*.

Her eyes were quite dry, and shining fearfully bright, undimmed by a single tear, as she swayed backwards and forwards on her knees in the very strength and abjectness of her misery.

Flinging, with an impatient gesture, the long hair back that had become loosened from the comb and had fallen over her face, she looked up and met Lord Castleton's

pitying gaze, as, loth to leave her all alone with that lifeless heap, he lingered near the entrance of the room ; but one meaning look was quite enough, and he hastily left her, to take his watch outside.

Alone with him ; alone with the one she had held dearest to her upon the earth, and yet to know that in a very little while even that which was left of him would be taken from her ; that she would never, ay never, look upon him again in this world !

She knelt close beside the couch, leaning over it, and studying intently, feature by feature, of the poor dead face, whose beauty had first won her virgin heart.

She touched his closed lids and his cold cheeks very gently and caressingly, as though her hands loved to linger in their office, and she kept on murmuring tenderest words to him, just as if his deafened ears could hear her.

‘O, Vere, Vere ! my husband, my dar-

ling! speak to me, speak to me! only one word, Vere, that I may hear your voice once more. O, my God, shall I never, *never* listen to him again, saying kind loving words as he did to-day, before he went away from me to—die! Die! O, you are *not* dead, Vere; you have not left me for ever!"

She shrieked loudly and frantically as the last words brought the truth vividly before her; and throwing herself down upon him, she broke into vehement sobs, which she neither could nor tried to restrain, while her slight figure shook from head to foot. The sound of her grieving awakened the boy, who stared at her fixedly for a moment or two with wide-open wondering eyes, and then laughed and crowed out loudly and gleefully at the novel scene.

Katie became quiet and still as the childish merriment fell upon the half-darkened lonely chamber of death, and shivered.

visibly as she heard it. Then she began stroking and patting her husband's icy hands, and smoothing his bright hair with her poor little trembling fingers; and stooping over him, she pressed a long and fervent kiss upon his mouth.

She grew calmer after that, and in a little while she rose up slowly, and with shaking limbs she managed to totter over to where the child still lay, surrounded by his toys. Taking him up, and staggering beneath the light weight he was, she carried him to the couch, and laid him down beside his father; and with a strange smile on her pale lips, watched him as he struck blow after blow playfully with his tiny fist on the dead man's face to awaken him. Then throwing her arm over the two that formed her all upon earth, she slid down on the floor, and wearily resting her cheek on Denison's rigid hand, she fell into happy unconsciousness.

They took him away from her clinging clasp, and buried him in a corner of the pretty little cemetery that stands quietly behind a hill. And they placed a tablet of black stone at his head, with large white letters inscribed upon it, 'Pray for the soul of the dead.' It was according to foreign usage, but Katie wished it; for it seemed to her to be the showing of an infinite and implicit faith in a blessed immortality.

By the newly-made grave the form of the poor sorrowing little wife knelt day after day, mid sunshine or storm. She neither moaned nor cried—she was simply broken-hearted. But when the very last pilgrimage was made, with her baby in her arms, she clung wildly to the senseless sod, raining down mad kisses upon it, talking to it incoherently, and bidding the child do the same, just as though the earth had been a living thing; until, astonished at her frantic gestures, and alarmed at the strange

glitter in her eyes, the boy drowned the sound of her weeping in his loud shrieks of fright. Hushing him into quietude, she stooped down again and again, and passed her hand very softly and caressingly over the mound, and over the tablet that bore her husband's name, while her lips moved in a last and silent farewell, and her heart sent up a prayer for the beloved dead lying at her feet. Then she slowly left the spot where in truth all her happiness lay buried for ever.

CHAPTER XIV.

EN DIEU EST TOUT.

‘Come to the bridal chamber, Death ;
Come to the mother when she feels
For the first time her first-born’s breath ;
Come where the blessed seals
That close the pestilence are broke,
And crowded cities hail its stroke ;
Come in consumption’s ghastly form,
The earthquake’s shock, the ocean storm,—
And thou art terrible ! The tear,
The groan, the knell, the pall, the bier,
And all we know, or dream, or fear
Of agony, are thine !’

MARCO BOZZANI.

It wanted yet a little time to the hour of starting by the Calais boat to Dover, and amongst a large crowd of passengers that were assembled on the pier preparatory to departure, the figure of Katie Denison

was visible, but shrouded in heavy crape garments that left her scarcely recognisable. By her side stood the faithful German nurse holding the child in her arms.

The morning was a very dark and dreary one under the depressing influence of a thick sea fog, which was only partially clearing off, although it was close upon one P.M. The atmosphere savoured a great deal more of the bitterness of mid-winter than of autumn, and the unpleasant addition of a strong bleak wind that blew freely across the Channel in keen gusts materially increased discomfort, and rendered the aspect of the weather for traversing the Straits far from agreeable. The waves, unusually rough and dense, kept dashing turbulent up against the walls of the pier with a low and sullen murmur like distant thunder; and notwithstanding the presence of so many human beings, the scene lacked all the liveliness and bustle that generally ac-

company departures and arrivals of the steamers at each port. Since the hour when Katie had first looked upon Denison's lifeless form, not even the shadow of a smile had been seen to cross her lips. That terrible sight appeared to have frozen up at once, as it were, the current of every feeling in her nature that had bordered on brightness, joyousness, or geniality.

She looked like a woman who lived in a dream; indifferent to, almost unconscious of, all passing around her; with a statuesque stillness that was painful to mark upon every feature, and a piteous sorrow in the expression of her lips. While her husband had lain there, even though his heart-throbs were quieted for ever, and his form was cold and rigid, Katie had felt happy. Yes, happy in comparison to the miserably forlorn and blank state into which her mind had sunk when once they had removed him away from her sight.

Death, robed in all the terror with which mortals invest it, had evoked in her not a single emotion of fear, or dread, or shrinking. It had appeared to the loving and desolate woman just as if her husband was yet more beautiful than he had been in life, and only perhaps a shade or so colder than he was often wont to be whenever she had ventured to demonstrate the depth of her affection by kisses and caresses. Nay, as he lay before her, so peaceful and so still, she was able to lean over him, and to press again and again her warm red lips to his icy mouth and hands without a rebuff meeting her ears as of old. Unrebuked, she could kneel beside the dead man's side, and pour out over the insen-sate form the eternal love of her full soul, while she swore that none other should ever call her wife as long as she lived.

All Denison's faults or vices were buried in oblivion, and all his virtues exaggerated

tenfold in those bitter hours of mourning, when the acuteness of her loss was so intense in its freshness. Outwardly calm, she would sit for hours gazing on the perfect features of the beloved face that was so soon to be hidden away from her under the sod, while inwardly her heart sank as she pictured her future life.

She had let them take him away from her at the last quietly and meekly, but her embrace had clung passionately to the mute white lips whose next kisses would be from loathsome worms; and she had wondered why they should remove her dead from her arms, since *her* eyes could trace no decay upon the smooth brow, over which her touch lingered so long and so fondly.

Denison, in spite of the flaws in his character, had a true heart to mourn for him, and went to his grave leaving but an image of beauty in his wife's memory. But

‘He who hath bent him o'er the dead
Ere the first day of life be fled,
The first dark day of nothingness,
The last of danger and distress,
Before decay's effacing fingers
Have swept the lines where beauty lingers,’

can understand the feelings that lived in Katie's mind.

As she stood upon the Calais pier she looked quite ten years older than she had done even a few short weeks before. Sorrow had already traced many a line on her face, and thrown a great shadow over the frank depths of her hazel eyes.

With her lineaments all so thin and wan, and her eyelids swollen with floods of futile tears, it was difficult to believe that she was the brilliant and beaming girl, full of health and spirits, that Denison had married only two years back.

She leant up listlessly against one of the pillar supports of the chains that edge the pier—she was always weak and tired

now, and all animation and energy had left her; never again could she feel the buoyancy of yore, it seemed to her as if so much of life had been compressed into so short a time—never as much as glancing at any one in the crowd, else perchance her gaze might have fallen on some familiar face; but with a far-off expression in her sad little countenance, as though all hope and happiness were become to her things entirely of the past.

She was thinking mournfully that she was very young yet—only twenty-two; and that if by the will of Providence she was doomed to reach old age, what a wretched and lonely life lay before her, with love gone out of it for ever.

She knew that she should never love any man again—Vere and her heart were buried together in that quiet little church-yard in a foreign town—and she felt that it was only through her child—*his* child—that

any joy or comfort in existence would ever come to bless her again; her little one, her darling, her world, the precious clasp of whose tiny arms was the sole panacea she found in her desolation and grief; to watch over him, to pray for him, the only end and aim of her future hours. She looked at the child and tried to smile at him, but it would not do; for the tears welled up into her eyes as she remembered that he was *fatherless*. The recollection of *who* had been her companion the very last time that she had stood upon that pier, flashed across her with a suddenness and vividness that acted upon her overwrought nerves strangely and powerfully.

For a minute she fancied she saw Denison standing close by her side, holding her palm in his; his tall figure wrapped in the white garments of the grave, just as she had last looked upon it.

A terror seized upon her, a clammy

coldness rose upon her limbs, and her eyes grew misty and glazed, yet she neither screamed nor swooned away ; but as a deadly faintness stole over her, in her desire to keep herself steady she snatched hastily and tightly at the nurse's arm.

Starting violently at the hard and sudden clutch, the woman turned quickly round, and the child, whom she had held supported against the swaying chain, fell headlong into the dark and turbid water.

A fearful shriek, that seemed to rend the air, burst wildly from the bereaved mother's lips, and with a wild terror in her dilated eyes, and with outstretched arms, she sprang forward to the edge as if to fling herself over the drop. But a strong hand held her back, and a well-known voice whispered hurriedly in her ear,

‘I will save him, or die !’ And Claude Castleton, flinging off his coat, jumped into the sea.

Above, upon the pier, were huddled close together a crowd of faces pale with horror and anxiety. Below, nothing to be seen but a slight glint of golden curls shining up through the thick foul water.

Once, twice it gleamed. Then, the third time, the gold mingled with Lord Castleton's flaxen hair, and a deafening cheer rose up from the excited mass of spectators above.

The rough waves had carried the little one some distance from land, and Castleton was nothing of a swimmer; but with the child's form encircled tightly with one arm, he struck out with the other bravely towards shore, fighting valiantly against the buffeting wind and tide until succour should be sent to him.

Nearer and nearer he came, and already Katie stretched yearningly out to clasp the priceless burden that he brought her, whilst an angelic smile of gratitude irradiated her blanched features.

All was the work of a few moments, and no help was nigh from the panic-bound witnesses.

One or two struggles that were almost superhuman, an arm flung wildly up in the air as if in a last farewell, then Claude's white face, with a tiny golden head resting closely against it, sank low beneath the cruel waves !

CHAPTER XV.

VALE.

‘Farewell!

*For in that word, that fatal word, howe'er
We promise, hope, believe, there breathes despair!*

THE warm beams of the sun fell slantwise down upon the bow-windows of the pretty drawing-room at the Larches, Ealing, and flooded with a red glory, just as they did some four years back, a lavish mass of blooming flowers and a woman's face.

The flowers glowed and blushed brightly and beautifully as of yore, while the fervid rays kissed and stole the fragrance from them; but the woman's face was changed. Loveliness still lingered over each feature, but the expression was altered and spiri-

tualised. All the wonted petulant play and sparkle of the countenance seemed to have quite died out. The sweet hazel eyes, in lieu of brilliancy, had gained softness and a little sadness—flashing out no defiant glances or saucy looks of the olden time. Her lips, though still pouting and ruby, seldom laughed with the gladsome ringing laugh of other days ; and the figure, robed always in deepest mourning, was become far slighter, and even slightly fragile in its proportions.

Katie was sitting in the accustomed favourite spot in which so many hours of her maidenhood had been passed ; the ‘dreaming’ place in which she had been wont to ‘build a bridge of fancies’ about love and life, and in which she had erected fairy castles that had fallen quickly into nothingness in the twinkling of an eye ; but now she was neither dreaming sweet dreams nor buoying herself up with ‘hope’s glittering

glory,' as she shared the broad stone window-ledge with the blood-red carnations and scented mignonette.

In her countenance and attitude gentle patience and resignation were palpable. 'Sorrow with its heavy wing' had touched her brow and thrown a shadow over her soul; but it had not, as it often does, rendered her morose, or bitter, or reckless.

The sun of her earthly life had indeed set early; but trial had purified her, and taught her to look always upwards for the only peace or rest she could ever feel again. The memory of the husband and the child that were lost to her never faded a moment out of her mind. In sleeping or in waking, those two dead faces looked for ever into her own, and she longed to be freed from life, that she might be with her dear ones again. But although she did not smile often, her lips never opened in murmuring or discontent. She strove to be

good and very patient, and she struggled on through a sadly loveless and lonely existence with a brave heart, from which all that savoured of pride or wilfulness had completely gone out, leaving it filled with the holiest and purest feelings of a woman's nature.

Katie sat at the window white and wan, a letter that had only reached her in the morning was in her hand, and its envelope, that the gentle summer's wind had blown off the sill, lay on the soft green grass below, with foreign stamps and postmark upon it.

The golden romance that Katie might have loved and fostered in her imagination a few years back was, to her thinking, a dead thing since stern and terrible reality had visited her life. 'Love' seemed to her now only a ghost risen from the grave, a miserable unreal phantom which human strength and power were unable to grasp

and to hold, and a love-letter was the last food she desired for her mind. Yet the love-letter before her was so totally unlike most of its species, that an undefinable feeling attracted her eyes to its pages, and made them linger long and sorrowfully upon the words.

The attraction that letter had for her might have only been, perchance, the secret but puissant sympathy that one suffering heart has for another. There was nothing mawkishly sentimental in the missive, no rhapsodies or ardent protestations of an undying attachment ; but Katie knew full well that truth—whole, pure, and unblemished truth—was stamped upon each word, and that it was a heart's last appeal before life should turn to death. And in spite of herself she read it over and over again.

‘KATIE ! — I know not whether my letter will be welcome, or whether it will

anger you ; but even with this terrible doubt at my heart, I *must* write to you once again.

‘Read this slowly and patiently, and do not decide hastily. *Try* and understand a little of what I have suffered since we two parted.

‘When you left me you took away everything from me: you left me nothing—hope and happiness, and even life itself; for you doomed me to a living death. O, Katie, you had better have killed me outright ! My whole existence since *that* day — the day of my death—has been an arid waste, unpeopled save by the ghosts of memories. You taught me to look for a Paradise; you smiled upon me, and led me to believe that an angel would hover about my hearth, and bless with its presence each hour that I breathed; and then you cast me away from you, without a look or one pitying word ! Surely you owe me some repara-

tion, Katie! I do not ask for *love*,—the love that *I* feel will be more than sufficient for us both.

‘Katie, dearest Katie! my first and my only love, can you ever bear to look upon me again? This is all I crave; for the rest I am willing to wait patiently, trusting that time and the unalterable devotion of a man’s strong nature may win me a place in your heart once more.

‘Do not, I pray of you, torture me with suspense, but write only one word, and let that word be “Come.”’

G. S.’

‘Poor George,’ she murmured to herself softly, as she folded up the letter, and she smiled a little, though sadly. She could not help feeling that it was pleasant to know that some one cared for her so much—that she was not quite alone in the wide, wide world.

The fragrant flowers, with the fervent

sunbeams playing at hide-and-go-seek upon them, looked very gay and bright; but Katie's heart was as heavy as lead, and her eyes were full of big glistening tears as she turned away her head wearily from the light.

‘I *dare* not say come, even if I would, for it would be cruel to link a good and honest life to a woman without a heart; and mine is dead and buried deep—half in the earth and half in that cold, cold water!’ She shuddered and closed her lids for a minute or so, to try and shut out that last sight, which had been even more dreadful to look upon than the other one.

After a little while she rose up slowly, and opening her desk sat down to write; but for a long, long while the pen in her hand rested motionless, and indecision was the expression of her face.

It was not that womanly longing for ‘love,’ and for a strong arm to shield and to

guide, were entering her breast and staying her hand.

She never dreamt of wavering for an instant in her unerring fealty to her dead.

She was only hesitating as to what manner of wording would be likely to wound George least. She had hurt him cruelly already; and sorrow had made her infinitely more tender-hearted than when life had been before her, clad in bright colours, and her hope and spirits were so buoyant that they swept away before them all softer emotions of pity and sympathy.

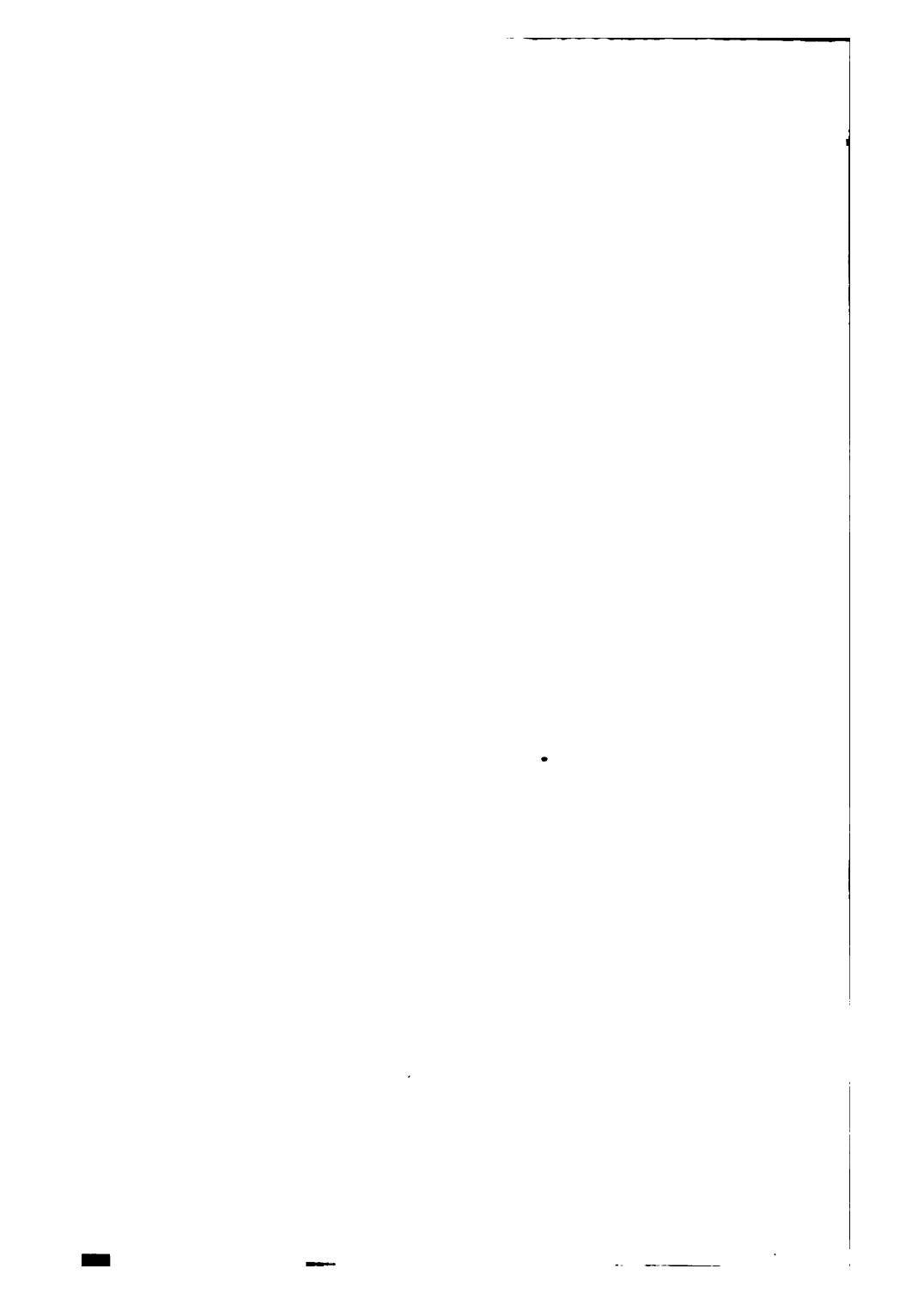
Then of a sudden she remembered that no matter how a death-warrant was worded, its purport remained the same; so hesitating no longer, she wrote, ‘Do *not* come. Farewell!’ And she dropped an involuntary tear upon her letter, as she closed it with fingers that shook just a little at their task.

The four words were quite enough. And

George Sutton, when he read them over and over again, with a blanched face, and a deadly sickness at his heart, knew quite well that a fresh appeal would be utterly fruitless, and that Katie would *never* be more to him than she was as Denison's Wife.

THE END.

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